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THE WORKS

OF

BISHOP SHERLOCK.

VOL I.

THE WORKS

OF

BISHOP SHERLOCK.

WITH

SOME ACCOUNT OF HIS LIFE,

SUMMARY OF EACH DISCOURSE, NOTES, &c.

BY THE REV. T. S. HUGHES, B. D.

VOL. I.

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TO

THE RIGHT HONORABLE AND RIGHT REVEREND

CHARLES JAMES

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON,

THIS EDITION OF THE LIFE AND WORKS

OF

ONE OF HIS MOST ILLUSTRIOUS PREDECESSORS

IS DEDICATED,

IN GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEGEMENT OF

HIS LORDSHIP'S KIND AND BENEFICIAL ADVICE TO THE EDITOR AT THE COMMENCEMENT OF HIS UNDERTAKING,

BY

HIS OBLIGED AND FAITHFUL

FRIEND AND SERVANT,

T. S. HUGHES.

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INTRODUCTION.

It has frequently been a subject of complaint, that a *Collection of the best English Divines*, from the scarcity of good editions, and the expense of procuring them, is rarely met with in the Libraries even of our Clergy, although these are the sources to which, after the Holy Scriptures, they must apply for instruction and edification. A few select volumes of some favorite Authors are perhaps found on their shelves; but a *regular series*, exhibiting the profound researches, the luminous expositions, the interesting criticisms, and the noble eloquence of British Theologians, falls to the lot of few: indeed our great public repositories themselves are not unfrequently deficient in so important a branch of literature. This observation is made from painful experience, since the Editor has not been able to collect the scattered works of the illustrious Sherlock in all the Libraries of Cambridge, including the Public Library itself; nor has it been without extraordinary pains and difficulty, that his Publisher has completed this Edition even in our Metropolis. To remedy the defects

above mentioned, and to enable both Clergy and Laymen to possess a treasure of real excellence, at a time when the Church of England requires *the best exertions of her sons*, is the great object of the present undertaking.

It would indeed be discreditable to an age, in which the works of so many Authors have been reprinted in a form combining both economy and convenience, if those of the *great ornaments* of our Church should be withheld from an *extended* circulation. It has been determined therefore to publish a series in which the following plan will be observed.

Each Work will be preceded by a Biographical Memoir of its Author, comprising a general account of the times in which he lived, with a particular reference to the state of religious opinions.

An Argument or concise Summary of Contents will be prefixed to every Sermon, Tract, or Disquisition, contained in each Volume; so that not only *direct* access may be had to any portion required for perusal or consultation, but the Summary of each Sermon may be considered as a Skeleton, well calculated to *assist the young Divine in Composition*.

Notes and observations will be added wherever they may appear necessary or useful; and at the end of each Author will be given an Index of passages in Scripture, which have been commented on in such Author.

BIOGRAPHICAL MEMOIR

OF

BISHOP SHERLOCK.

THE illustrious prelate with whose works we begin our series, was a younger son of Dr. WILLIAM SHERLOCK, Master of the Temple, and Dean of St. Paul's, a divine who, having passed the greater part of his life in the excitement of polemics, became celebrated in his day for the multiplicity of his controversial writings, but is more advantageously known to posterity by his admirable Treatise on Death. After living to see his son Thomas, who is the subject of this Memoir, rapidly advancing in a course honorable to himself and useful to mankind, he died at Hampstead, June 19, 1707, and was buried in his own cathedral, leaving a very considerable property to his surviving family, which consisted of two sons and as many daughters.

Bishop SHERLOCK was born in London, A. D. 1678. Of his infancy and childhood I find no traces, nor can I discover that he showed any precocity of intellect, though his genius soon distinguished him at Eton, a school well

adapted to excite and bring out those qualities of emulation and ambition which continued always to distinguish him: there he laid the foundation of that classical elegance and purity of style, which shine so conspicuously in his writings; there he acquired an early knowlege of character, an anticipated experience of society, which was of great service to him in after life; and there also he formed powerful connexions, which materially contributed to advance him in his profession. Among the friends of his early youth, who became promoters of his future interests, may be reckoned Lord Viscount Townshend, Mr. Pelham, and Sir Robert Walpole; the latter of whom not only entertained, but invariably expressed, the highest opinion of his talent and integrity. Nor was it in the studies of the place only, and at the head of his class, that young Sherlock was seen to advantage: he was equally eminent for his skill in athletic exercises; and never failed to lead his companions in those sports and amusements, over which Hygeia herself may be said to preside, and which, while they strengthen the body, add vigor also to the mental powers. It is always understood that Pope's expression of 'the plunging prelate,'* in the Dunciad, bears an allusion to those early habits of promptitude and decision, of which he exhibited an example in the exercise of bathing; for when other boys stood hesitating and shivering on the bank of 'Father Thames,' Sherlock plunged in headlong,

——— Foremost to cleave
With pliant arm his glassy wave.

This at least is the interpretation given to it by Warton on the authority of Sir Robert Walpole.

* Book ii. l. 323.

When he quitted those delightful scenes, so calculated to impress indelibly their images on the youthful mind, he was removed to Cambridge in 1693, and admitted of Catherine Hall, under the tuition of Dr. Leng. What induced his father, who was himself a member of Peter House, to place him at this college, I am unable to determine; but it is a curious circumstance, that the master, and the tutor under whom he was admitted, his great rival and contemporary Hoadley, whom he found there, as well as Sherlock himself, were all promoted to the episcopal bench.*

It redounds much to his credit, that in so small a society, where the incentives to emulation are necessarily curtailed, at a time also when no prizes were instituted, as at present, to call forth the powers and exercise the genius of academic youth, he neglected not the study of those ancient authors, whose very language affords constant exercise to the mind, in struggling with intellectual difficulties, whilst they abound with sentiments and images of the greatest beauty and sublimity. But though that powerful stimulus to exertion which numbers give, was now withdrawn, still even in the circumscribed limits of his present society, Sherlock found one strenuous candidate, who

* Sir W. Dawes, the Master, was made Bishop of Chester, 1707; Archbishop of York, 1714. Dr. Leng, Bishop of Norwich, 1723; Hoadley, Bishop of Bangor, 1715; Hereford, 1721; Salisbury, 1723; Winchester, 1738. Sherlock, Bishop of Bangor, 1727; Salisbury, 1734; London, 1748. The present worthy Master of Catherine Hall, when he showed me the order-book, pointed out to my notice the solitary instance in which Sherlock signed it as Fellow, on occasion of the Audit, Nov. 7. 1798; when the signatures of the three above-mentioned distinguished persons appear with only one other, that of Mr. Thomas Tillson.

started with him in the race of fame, and kept the principle of emulation in full activity. This antagonist, who has been already alluded to, was the celebrated Hoadley, whose religious and political opinions were subsequently attacked by Sherlock with an asperity which makes it probable that the seeds of rivalry, if not of animosity, were thus early sown: a little anecdote indeed is preserved, which seems to show that they never regarded each other with feelings of peculiar complacency. One day, as they came from the tutor's lecture on Tully's Offices, Hoadley observed, 'Well, Sherlock, you figured away finely to-day by help of Cockman's Translation.'—'No, indeed,' replied Sherlock, 'I did not; for though I tried all I could to get a copy, I heard of only one; and that you had secured.'

There can be but little doubt however of Sherlock's profound knowlege, as well as exquisite taste, in classical literature; since Warburton, who differed from him greatly in opinions, and felt very little affection for his person, took every opportunity of extolling his learning and talent, and submitted portions of the Divine Legation to his inspection, as they were passing through the press.* The following are his sentiments, expressed in a letter to Hurd, in whose favor he had been applying to Bishop Sherlock for a Whitehall preachership: 'It is time you should think of being a little more known; and it will not be the least thing acceptable in this affair, that it will bring you into the acquaintance of this Bishop, who stands so supereminent in the learned and political world. *I can overlook a great deal* for such a testimony, so willing to be paid to merit.'†

* Nichols's Lit. Anec. Vol. v. p. 544.

† Warburton and Hurd's Correspondence, p. 20. The following

But Sherlock did not waste his precious hours at the University in wooing even 'the willing muse,' or 'sporting with Amaryllis in the shade:' his was a character of a very different cast; he cultivated not an exclusive system; and from the severe line of study which he had laid down for himself, no allurements, even of intellectual pleasure, could make him swerve. When he had enlarged his powers of imagination, and refined his taste by the varied stores of Greek and Roman literature, he resolved to keep the balance even in his mind, by cultivating those sciences which impart accuracy, strength, and soundness to the reasoning faculties; and though the studies of the University and the rewards of merit, stood on much lower ground than they do in the present day, still the morning-star of science had risen, and the splendid system of Newtonian philosophy was rapidly advancing in the place which gave it birth.* To those abstruse but invigorating studies Sherlock steadily applied himself; the effect of which became very

passage occurs in the letter from Bishop Sherlock to Warburton, in which he promises to remember his friend: 'I am told we are to expect soon something from your hand in vindication of the miraculous prevention of Julian's attempt to rebuild Jerusalem. I have a pleasure in seeing any thing of yours, and I dare promise myself to see the argument you have undertaken set in a true and clear light:' p. 21. Pope, in one of his letters to Warburton, thus speaks of Sherlock, and the kind of intimacy which subsisted between them: 'We are told that the Bishop of Salisbury is expected here daily, who I know is your friend: at least, though a Bishop, he is too much a man of learning to be your enemy.'—Pope's Works by Bowles, vol. ix. p. 389.

* In 1694 the celebrated Dr. Samuel Clarke, then an undergraduate, defended in the schools a question taken from Newton's Principia.

perceptible in the clear reasoning, the logical precision, and the lucid arrangement of his compositions; whilst the more immediate consequence to himself was, that when he took his degree of A. B. in 1797, his name appeared on the Tripos, or list of Honors, in a situation similar to that which Hoadley had obtained two years before,* and the great Bentley in 1679. The place which each of these *tria lumina* nominally occupied was sixth; but at this time, and for about half a century afterwards, the vice-chancellor and proctors claimed the unworthy privilege of inserting the names of three under-graduates in the list, which were placed immediately below the first man of the year: so that virtually the place occupied by Sherlock and his two predecessors was the third.

On the 12th of August, 1798, he was elected Fellow of his college,† and his election was signed by his antagonist Hoadley, who had preceded him in this honor by one year. Very soon after he had arrived at the canonical age, he entered into holy orders; and in 1701 proceeded to his degree of A. M., but continued to reside in the University, that he might prepare himself, amid the tranquil scenes of a collegiate life, for the more active duties of the clerical profession: into these he soon entered with great earnestness and alacrity, when a circumstance occurred which was calculated, in a peculiar manner, to draw forth the powers of his naturally strong and cultivated intellect. On the 28th of Nov. 1704, when he was but twenty-six years old, he was appointed to the Mastership of the Tem-

* Hoadley was but one year senior to him on the college boards, but it seems that he had seven terms allowed on account of extreme bad health.—Supplement to Biogr. Brit. p. 99.

† College order book.

ple, on the resignation and through the influence of his father. So high and important a station, with all the jealousy and prejudices that it excited, would have borne down most men at that early age; but Sherlock's vigorous and elastic character raised him above all difficulties: having already laid up vast stores of knowlege, having his judgment ripe, and an ambition equal to his abilities, he soon surpassed the most eminent preachers of the day in true pulpit oratory. For his variety of matter and judicious arrangement of it, for the strength and solidity of his reasoning, for his force of language, for his flow of natural and manly eloquence, we may safely appeal to those admirable Discourses which have long ministered delight and consolation to the Christian: they hold no secondary rank among the writings of our Divines. Nor was it only in the weight of his words and argument that his *preaching was with power*, but also in the force and energy with which it was delivered: for 'though his voice was not melodious, but accompanied rather with a thickness of speech, yet were his words uttered with so much propriety, and with such strength and vehemence, that he never failed to take possession of his whole audience and secure their attention. This powerful delivery of words so weighty and important as his always were, made a strong impression on the minds of his hearers, and was not soon forgot.'* His station at the Temple was held by Sherlock through the different stages of his preferment, almost to the close of life:† he greatly enjoyed the society to which it introduced him,

* Extract from his Funeral Sermon by Dr. Nicolls.—Gent. Mag. 1762. p. 23.

† Almost all his letters that I have met with are dated from his house at the Temple.

was extremely intimate with the most eminent lawyers of the day, and was universally beloved and esteemed among them: he always preached at their church during term-time, and to the early and constant necessity of addressing so polished and acute an audience, may be ascribed in great measure that high tone both of composition and of argument which distinguishes his sermons.*

In 1707 he must have resigned his fellowship, for he then entered into the marriage state with Miss Judith Fountaine,† a lady descended from a good family in

* The following is the opinion of an able writer in the Quarterly Review on Sherlock's pulpit eloquence: 'the calm and dispassionate disquisition on some text of Scripture, or the discussion of some theological question, henceforward to be the exclusive object of an English sermon, was carried by Sherlock to a perfection rarely rivalled, unless by Smalridge, nearly his own contemporary, and by Horsley in more recent times. The question is clearly stated and limited; every objection anticipated; and the language is uniformly manly and vigorous. Sherlock, indeed, occasionally breaks out in passages of greater warmth and earnestness,' &c. For Pope's sentiments with regard to his powers of oratory, see Dunciad, B. iii. 203.

'Still break the benches, Henley! with thy strain,
While Sherlock, Hare, and Gibson preach in vain.'

On which passage Warton remarks, that 'in former editions Kennet was named, not Sherlock:' the latter was then no great favorite with Pope, under the lash of whose satire he fell more than once. 'The sermons of Sherlock,' Warton goes on to say, 'though censured by Mr. Church, are master-pieces of argument and eloquence. His Discourses on Prophecy, and Trial of the Witnesses, are perhaps the best defences of Christianity in our language.'

† From the monumental inscription. She was related to the Chesters of Cockenhatch, in Hertfordshire.—Nichols's Lit. Anec. Vol. i. p. 556.

Yorkshire, with whom he enjoyed a great portion of happiness: her character is slightly touched by Cumberland in his Memoirs, where he observes, that 'she was a truly respectable woman, and his mother enjoyed much of her society, till the Bishop's death brought a successor in his place.' It was probably owing to this connexion that Cumberland's father was permitted to exchange the living of Stanwick for that of Fulham, and was collated by the Bishop to a small prebend in St. Paul's, the only one that became vacant within his time.*

But neither the bands of matrimony, nor his active and useful employment at the Temple, detained Sherlock long from the service of Alma Mater. The value of his character was well known to his college, by the Society of which he was recalled in 1714, having been unanimously elected Master, on the resignation of Sir William Dawes. In the same year also he took his degree of D. D., after having held a public disputation at the commencement with the celebrated Waterland, who had also just been nominated to the headship of his own college. 'This theological disputation,' says Dean Monk,† 'excited an uncommon sensation, not confined to the University: the subject was the question of Arian Subscriptions; Waterland being the respondent, and Sherlock the opponent. The unusual circumstance of a public debate between two heads of houses, the general interest of the topic, and still more, the learning, ingenuity, and fluency of the combatants, made a great and lasting impression. They were both young men, distinguished by talent and erudition, and they exhibited, on their elevation, great aptitude for

* Memoirs p. 136—138. † Life of Bentley, p. 291.

business and discretion as well as activity, which speedily gave them influence and authority in the body.'* This eulogy was shown to be richly deserved by each in his conduct as vice-chancellor. Sherlock was first elected to that dignified office, and exhibited an example of fidelity, acuteness, and diligence in the discharge of its duties,

* The circumstance is thus alluded to by Mr. Seed: 'In the year 1714, at the commencement, he (Waterland) kept a Divinity Act for his Bachelor of Divinity's degree. His first question was, *whether Arian Subscription was lawful;* a question worthy of him, who had the integrity to abhor, with a generous scorn, all prevarication; and the capacity to see through and detect those evasive arts by which some would palliate their disingenuity. When Dr. James, the Professor, had endeavored to answer his *Thesis*, and embarrass the question with the dexterity of a person long practised in all the arts of a subtle disputant; he immediately replied, in an extempore discourse of above half-an-hour long, with such an easy flow of proper and significant words, and such an undisturbed presence of mind, as if he had been reading, what he has since printed, *The case of Arian Subscription considered*, and the *Supplement to it*. He unravelled the Professor's fallacies, reinforced his own reasonings, and showed himself so perfect a master of the language, the subject, and himself, that all agreed no one ever appeared to greater advantage. There were several members of the University of Oxford there, who remember the great applauses he received, and the uncommon satisfaction which he gave. He was happy in a *first opponent*, one of the greatest ornaments of the church and finest writers of the age, who gave full play to his abilities, and called forth all that strength of reason of which he was master.' This opponent, says Bishop Van Mildert, was Dr. Thomas Sherlock, afterwards Bishop of London. It has been observed, that probably the account of this performance having reached Dr. Clarke's ears, gave occasion to his omitting in the second edition of his Scripture Doctrine of the Trinity, the passage in his first edition respecting Subscription to the Articles, which had given offence.—Life of Waterland, p. 13.

which has probably never been surpassed. Finding the public archives in a state of great confusion through the neglect of former ages, he set himself with ardor and perseverance to arrange them in a compact and regular digest;* by which means he acquired such a knowlege of the constitution of the University, that in subsequent parts of his life he was appealed to as a kind of oracle, when doubts and difficulties occasionally arose with regard to its jurisdiction and government.† Indeed he was very soon called on to exercise his judgment in a very important case of this kind.

Already had the celebrated Bentley, that glory and disgrace of literature, begun to distract the University by those dissensions which his arrogant, selfish, and tyrannical conduct protracted almost to the latest period of his existence. This extraordinary personage having been appointed by Bishop Patrick to the Archdeaconry of Ely, had empowered his official, Dr. Brookbank, to grant probates of wills and administrations of effects to the heirs of members of the University; a right which was considered as belonging to the Academical Court. On this ground, when Bentley was, in the ordinary course of things, approaching to a second year of the vice-chancellor's office, a grace passed unanimously through the Senate, Oct. 10, 1712, enacting, that in future no archdeacon of Ely, or his official, even though he might be head of a house,

* Dr. Sherlock, (says Dean Monk, in a note to his Life of Bentley, p. 292.) during his year of office, compiled a ms. book on the property, rights, privileges, and customs of the University. This valuable document is said to have been lost by a vice-chancellor some years ago: a copy of it however is preserved in Cole's Mss. vol. xxi. p. 237.

† Biogr. Brit. Sup. p. 230.

should be capable of acting as vice-chancellor, or even as his deputy.*

The Master of Trinity College remained thus under the ban of the University about two years, until Sherlock became vice-chancellor; when the official, with the principal's concurrence, submitted to his arbitration the whole matter in dispute, to be by him equitably and amicably decided: 'accordingly,' says Bentley's learned biographer,† 'the vice-chancellor, after an examination of the charters, records, and registers, drew up a distinct statement of the different descriptions of persons, to the probates of whose wills the University was entitled: whereupon the official subscribed an engagement never to interfere with those claims; and the archdeacon ratified the concessions, in the name of himself and his successors. Those documents being published to the Senate in a convocation, were immediately followed by a grace, cancelling and annulling the late resolution; and the repeal was next day voted by the body, with the same unanimity as the censure.'‡

On the 4th of the following month the sense which the University entertained of Bentley's superlative merits in the cause of revealed religion, was testified by its public expression of thanks for the admirable work which he had published against Collins, under the assumed name of Phileleutherus Lipsiensis.§ As some people asserted that the University had been taken by surprise in this instance, and the grace had

* Dean Monk's Life of Bentley, p. 262.

† Page 292. ‡ Ibid.

§ The grace on this occasion was drawn up by his friend and supporter Waterland.—Bishop Van Mildert's Life of Waterland, p. 13.

been clandestinely passed through the Senate at a single congregation,* Dean Monk has taken some pains to vindicate the great Aristarchus and his friends from this charge of artifice and collusion: he observes 'that the motion was made with unusual pomp,' and that 'the person answerable for the management, had there been any, was Sherlock, the vice-chancellor, who can never be reckoned among the friends of the Master of Trinity.'†

In truth it redounds greatly to the credit of the subject of this Memoir, that he was not numbered among those friends. I am inclined to think that the sound sense, the accurate legal knowlege, and the strict integrity of Sherlock's character, would never have allowed him to encourage the scandalous acts of that extraordinary personage, who seemed as if he took delight in stirring up the waves of strife around him, just as one might imagine some powerful enchanter to raise the foaming billows of the ocean, that he might plunge amidst their furrows, and defy their rage. But that Sherlock became one of Bentley's most determined opponents, was probably owing, not so much to his detestation of the other's tyranny, as to the different view he took of politics, and to the associates with whom he was accustomed to act; one of whom was connected with him by nearer ties than those of friendship:‡ a similarity however of opinion in ecclesiastical matters, (for Bentley, though he was a Whig in politics,

* This actually gave rise to a decree which passed soon afterwards, declaring, 'that no public business should be completed except in two congregations.'—Life of Bentley, p. 293.

† Page 293.

‡ Dr. Gooch, Master of Caius College, whom Bentley designated as the 'empty Gotch of Caius,' in whose vice-chancellorship the Master of Trinity was degraded, and who was the leader

by no means sided with that party in all their low church doctrines,*) and a mutual respect which each of these two great men bore for the other's talents and attainments, kept them from that personal collision, which so frequently took place between some individuals and the great Aristarchus, to the disgrace of learning and scandal of the University. As might have been expected, when personalities did occur, they arose on the part of Bentley; and the nickname of Cardinal Alberoni, which he fixed on his antagonist, from a fancied resemblance of his active exertions and extensive influence to the intriguing politics of the Spanish minister, adhered to Sherlock long after the circumstances which gave birth to it had been forgotten.

It becomes necessary here to advert briefly to the state of parties at Cambridge, as an introduction to one of the most splendid bequests that regal bounty ever made to a seat of learning. Political animosity was perhaps now at its height; and the enmity between Whigs and Tories was scarcely any where more violent: great discretion, therefore, was necessary for a person holding so high and responsible an office as that of vice-chancellor, to escape obloquy, whilst he carried himself firmly, but temperately, through the waves of contending factions. In his endeavors to this effect, Sherlock seems to have been eminently successful; but it must be added that his difficulties were considerably lessened by the different charac-

of his adversaries in the University, married Sherlock's sister; and the closest intimacy always subsisted between these two brothers-in-law.

* It is to this cause that Dean Monk, with great probability of truth, assigns Bentley's forbearance to take up the cudgels in the Bangorian Controversy.

ter of Tory politics in Cambridge, from that which they assumed in the sister university. At Oxford they were mixed up with the strong leaven of Jacobite principles; whence arose disturbances which sometimes required military aid to quell them. But at Cambridge the Tories, though numerically preponderant, were for the most part distinguished by a firm adherence to the Hanoverian succession. Of this number was our vice-chancellor: but when, on the night of the Pretender's birth-day this year (1715), certain disturbances arose from some young men, which Sherlock and his coadjutors prudently passed over as the freaks of youth or inebriety, and thereby incurred the charge of conniving at such excesses, and of encouraging sentiments hostile to the reigning family, a loyal and energetic address to his Majesty was carried through the Senate, which avowed, in the strongest terms, a determination of upholding the Hanoverian succession on the principles of the Church of England.

On this occasion, when 'a troop of horse,' according to the witty epigram of the day, was sent to curb the Tory spirit of Oxford, a magnificent donation of books, purchased by the King from the executors of the deceased Bishop Moore for 6000*l.*, rewarded the Whig principles of Cambridge. Notice of this valuable present, which had been suggested and advised by Lord Townshend, one of the schoolfellows and early friends of Sherlock, was communicated to him as vice-chancellor, for the information of the University, in a letter from his Lordship, dated September 20th, 1715.* The gratitude of that learned body for this signal generosity, was expressed by an address to the King, and another to the minister; 'in both

* University Register.

of which,' says the Dean of Peterborough,* 'we find specimens of that glowing eloquence frequently conspicuous in the writings of Dr. Sherlock.' The insertion of these documents, which, through the kindness of my valued friend the present registrary,† I have procured from the grace-book of the University, must prove acceptable to the reader, while they fully justify that opinion which the learned Dean has advanced concerning the intellectual powers of their author: with respect to their orthography, which has been carefully observed, that must, I think, be referred, at least in one instance, which is marked by italics, to the worthy registrary of the day, rather than to our vice-chancellor. The address to King George was carried up by Dr. Sherlock in person, attended by many heads of houses and other members of the Senate, who were introduced to His Majesty by Lord Townshend, in the absence of the Duke of Newcastle, then Chancellor of the University.

To the King's Most Excellent Majesty,—The humble address of thanks from the Chancellor, Masters, and Scholars of the University of Cambridge.

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We beg leave to approach your Majesty with our most humble thanks for the gracious mark of royal favor which your Majesty has bestowed on your ancient University of Cambridge. There never was an occasion when we were either more desirous to express our sentiments of gratitude, or less able to do it to our own satisfaction. The genius of learning, which has for many ages so happily presided in this place, cannot furnish us with language to utter what we feel. There is nothing to which even the wishes of your

* Life of Bentley, p. 296.

† W. Hustler, Esq., Fellow of Jesus College.

University extend, that is not fully contained in the happiness she now enjoys of calling your Majesty her King and her Patron: one is the common blessing of every *Britain*, the other the peculiar privilege of the sons of learning. The noble collection of books and manuscripts gathered in many years by the great industry and accurate judgment of the late Bishop of Ely, though in itself exceeding valuable, is upon no account so welcome to your University, as it is a testimony of your royal favour: the memory of which will be constantly preserved by this ample benefaction, worthy to bear the title of the donor, and to be for ever styled the royal library. Liberty and learning are so united in their fortunes, that your Majesty's known character of being the great protectour of the liberty of Europe, led us to expect what our experience has now confirmed, that you would soon appear the patron and encourager of learning. Such royal qualitys must necessarily produce the proper returns of duty and affection. Your University will endeavour, as she is bound to do by the strongest ties of interest and gratitude, to promote the happiness of your government. And tis with the greatest pleasure she observes, that some there are whose youth was formed under her care, of whose abilitys and fidelity your Majesty has had the fullest experience. Your royal progenitors, the kings and queens of England, moved by their regard to virtue and learning, have conferred many large privileges and donations on this place; those who shine with the greatest lustre in story, appear the foremost in the list of our patrons and benefactours; and as your Majesty's name will be an ornament to the annals of Britain, so shall it stand through ages to come a perpetual honour to the records of this University. It shall be our incessant prayer to God for your Majesty, that he would long preserve you to reign over us in peace and tranquillity, that he would extend your empire over the hearts of your subjects, a dominion for which he then designed you, when he adorned you with so much goodness and clemency.

To which his Majesty was pleased to make the following most gracious answer:—

It is great satisfaction to me that this first mark of my favour has been so welcome and agreeable to you. The dutiful and grateful manner in which you have expressed your thanks upon this occasion, will oblige me to take all opportunities of giving farther proofs

of my affection to my University of Cambridge, being very sensible how much the encouragement of learning will always tend to the security and honour of our Constitution both in Church and State.

To the Right Honorable the Ld Viscount Townshend, one of his Majesty's Principal Secretarys of State.

May it please y^r^ Lordship,

We have paid our duty to the King in an address of thanks for the mark of Royal Favour wch he has bestowed on this University, by giving us the Library of the late Bp. of Ely. But we cannot think ourselves discharged of the obligations we are under upon this account, till we have made our acknowledgem^ts^ to y^r^ Ldship for the signal favour we have received from you. Had not y^r^ Ldship remembered the place of y^r^ education with a kindness almost peculiar to y^rself^, we had wanted that great encouragem^t^ of Learning w^h^ now, by y^r^ Ldship's powerfull interposition on our behalf, we enjoy from the King's bounty.

We are sensible that y^r^ Ldship acted in this matter wth the noble view of promoting the King's honour and the publick good; and tis a blessing both to Prince and country, when those, who enjoy the greatest share in their Prince's favour, have so much virtue and honour as to use it to such excellent Purposes. And this is so far from lessening our obligation to y^r^ Ldship, that it receives a great addition from this consideration, that y^r^ Ldship thought us not unworthy to be distinguish'd by the King's favour in order to such ends.

Y^r^ Ldship is so nearly related to us, as once a member, now an honored Patron of this University, that we shall always esteem y^r^ Ldship's Prosperity as our own, and reckon ourselves the safer and securer the more y^r^ Ldship advances in Honour and Power.

Y^r^ Ldship's

Most obedient humble Serv^ts^,

The Vice-chancell^r^ and the Senate of the University of Cambridge.

Given in full Senate, 7^br^ 24th, 1715.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor and Gentlemen of the Senate,

I am much obliged to you for the honour of y^r^ letter, and for the kind acknowledgements you are pleased to bestow on my endeavours for your service; but I should be guilty of Ingratitude to his Majesty, and of injustice to you, did I suffer that to be ascribed to my interposition w^h^ was so entirely owing to his Majesty's generous inclination to encourage his faithfull University of Cambridge. The only part I can assume to myself, is that of having suggested to his Majesty's wishes such a method of conveying his Royall favour as I hoped might prove most agreeable to you; nor was it possible that much Sollicitation should be neccessary to induce him to furnish you with those materials of Learning w^h^ he was secure w^d^ become so many weapons in y^r^ hands to guard and maintain the faith of the Church, the rights of the Crown, and the Liberties of the British Constitution.

I hope you will continue me the justice to believe that I shall gladly embrace any opportunity of testifying that unfeigned Affection and Gratitude I shall ever retain for the University within which I had the happiness to be educated.

I am with the greatest respect,

M^r^. Vicechancellor and Gentlemen of the Senate,

Y^r^ most obedient humble Servant,

TOWNSHEND.

Whitehall, 4th Octob^r^, 1715.

While we are on this topic, it would be unfair to withhold from Sherlock's successor in the vice-chancellorship, the praise due to him for his exertions in the proper disposal of this munificent gift. To convey it to its place of destination,' says his learned biographer, 'and to provide a fit place for its reception, were among the first cares that devolved on him: and he is stated to have exerted himself, during his continuance in office, in making various arrangements for its proper and convenient disposal; and although these were not actually completed

till some time after, all the preliminary steps were taken during his administration.'*

After Lord Townshend had been thus instrumental in procuring for his University some of its choicest treasures, he did not forget its head; for, through his influence, Dr. Sherlock, immediately after the resignation of his office, was promoted to the Deanery of Chichester, in November 1715. Finding his residence there unfit for the purposes either of comfort or convenience, he pulled it down and rebuilt it; but in a style which savors strongly of the bad taste in architecture which so generally prevailed at that period. He did not however immediately vacate his University preferment, which he retained until 1719, with the laudable and conscientious purpose of carrying a suit through the Court of King's Bench which affected the rights of his office. In the latter part of Queen Anne's reign an act of Parliament had been passed, by which a stall in the cathedral of Norwich was permanently attached to the Mastership of Catherine Hall. Some difficulty however arose about the admission of Sherlock to this prebend, as the statutes of the chapter seemed to oppose it, in consequence of his already holding a similar dignity in the cathedral of St. Paul: but after a litigation of considerable length, the question was decided in his favor, it being determined that the act of Parliament suspended the operation of the local statutes. Soon after this event Sherlock resigned his mastership in 1719, having been for several years the great leader and manager of public business in the University; nor, from the documents which I have perused, can I discover that his conduct

* Bishop Van Mildert's Life of Waterland, p. 14.

was regulated by any principles but such as do honor to his integrity as well as to his ability. From many testimonies to his candor and freedom from the malignity of party, which are extant, I select that of Dr. Disney, author of the life of Arthur Ashley Sykes; for this latter gentleman having been the most violent of all Sherlock's antagonists, the evidence of his biographer cannot be suspected of partiality towards the object of his opposition. Yet Dr. Disney hesitates not to assert, 'that Sherlock does not seem to have carried his displeasure against his adversaries and their associates into the little muddy streams of party resentment:'* and whoever shall contemplate the state of our University at that period, in the picture drawn of it by the Dean of Peterborough in his admirable life of Bentley, will not be inclined to undervalue this praise. Yet it seems that Sherlock did not wholly withdraw himself from Alma Mater, nor cease to take an interest in her welfare; for before the great Aristarchus was restored, in 1724, to the honors of the doctorate, from which he had been suspended by a vote of the Senate, a Syndicate was appointed of certain leading members in the University, to take measures for the interest of that body; and amongst them the name of Sherlock is found, together with an ac-

* Life of Sykes, p. 70, note. Dr. Disney goes on to confirm his assertion by the testimony of another person. Dr. Clarke, (says he) in a letter to Mr. Jackson of Rossington, in August 1718, on occasion of the high church party at Cambridge having formed so strong a party in the *Caput*, against admitting Mr. Jackson to his Master's degree, as to oblige him to desist from pursuing it, says: 'it is of great consequence to the Jacobite cause to discourage such persons as you are. I shall particularly thank the vice-chancellor, Dr. Gooch, and Dean Sherlock, Master Cath. Hall, *for being of a better spirit.*'

knowlegement of his extraordinary and useful activity in the cause. The grace offered to the Senate on this occasion was drawn up by Waterland, and is dated September 26, 1723.*

It is time however we should revert to that celebrated contest which introduced Sherlock to the world as one of the most able disputants of the age, and which, from the great leader of the opposite party, has been denominated, The Bangorian Controversy. We of the present day, who happily are strangers to the disastrous scenes of an unsettled government, and are accustomed more to form our opinions from conclusions of the understanding, whether rightly or wrongly drawn, than to defer implicitly to authority, and to echo the watch-word of a party, can scarcely gain a proper notion of the heats and animosities which this dispute excited. To attempt it we must take into consideration the peculiar state of parties, or rather of factions, which then existed both in church and state. The doctrines of the Revolution were at that time but partially admitted: the Jacobites were strong in many parts of the kingdom, and existed in all; while they sedulously fomented disaffection in other parties, and attached themselves to each, as it seemed disposed to encourage their pretensions: non-jurors, non-conformists, and sectarians

* Sherlock, and the party who acted with him, had been severely attacked for their conduct, in a pamphlet by Mr. Arthur Ashley Sykes. 'When a reply to this was found to be indispensable,' says the Dean of Peterborough (Life of Bentley, p. 387.) 'the powerful pen of Sherlock was called forth to defend the conduct of the academical aristocracy, of which he was himself believed to be the main-spring. He immediately gave the world his own narrative and view of the affair, in which he displays all the art of an experienced controversialist:' &c.

of every description, were constantly breaking out into acts of animosity against the established church, and the government which protected it; nor did the Popish Pretender fail to take advantage of these circumstances, by hovering around the coasts, stirring up rebellion within the realm, and the hostility of foreign potentates from without. In the mean time the country was divided generally into two great parties, Tories and Whigs; terms which might be taken as synonymous with those of high and low churchmen, so thoroughly were political opinions identified with theological tenets and rules of ecclesiastical discipline. The former of these, or at least the greater part of them, upheld the doctrines of indefeasible hereditary right, unlimited non-resistance, and inherent ecclesiastical authority, to a degree which went to chain down man's free spirit, and render him at once the slave and instrument of tyranny: a majority of the latter, on the contrary, in their hatred for popery, and love of that blessed Revolution which liberated us from its fetters, would have loosened the bands of church authority, inconsistently with the safety of the Protestant establishment. These professed a liberality of sentiment which led them to coalesce with all classes of dissenters, and a latitude of opinion which would have opened every avenue of office to their wily associates; of whom many were planning, and more desiring, the overthrow of our constitution.

This state of affairs, if duly considered, will in some measure account for the strong prejudices and violent animosities which reigned at that period; whilst they tend to palliate what may appear unreasonable obduracy in that party, which opposed itself to any relaxation of laws or tests that originated in no unjust or oppressive principle,

but had been the result of self-defence and state necessity: they partook not of the nature of penal statutes and religious persecution, until the necessity of self-defence had ceased with the animosities which called it into action.

During the reign of Queen Anne, Mr. Hoadley, then a London clergyman, had published many able works in defence of natural and revealed religion, as well as of civil liberty, freedom of conscience, and extended toleration. This produced, in 1709, a resolution of the House of Commons, which declared that he, having often strenuously justified the principles on which her Majesty and the nation proceeded at the Revolution, had justly merited the favor and recommendation of that House, and that an humble address be presented to her Majesty, praying that she would bestow some dignity on so distinguished a writer, for his eminent services both to church and state. About this time, however, Tory principles began to prevail in the councils of Queen Anne; and the doctrines of divine right and passive obedience, so loudly trumpeted forth by the contemptible Sacheverell, had taken possession of her mind; so that she returned a civil answer to her Commons, but paid no farther attention to their recommendation. Hoadley's advancement therefore was postponed, until the recurrence of more liberal men and measures, at the accession of George I., procured his appointment to the Bishoprick of Bangor. In 1716 he published his *Preservative against the Principles and Practices of the Non-jurors*,* which was

* One of the publications to which this was intended as an antidote, is thus noticed by Calamy: 'Some messengers, searching for a scandalous paper called 'The Shift Shifted,' happened to meet with a book entitled 'the Case of Schism in the Church of England truly stated,' by Mr. Howell, a clergyman; who was thereupon

followed, in March, 1717, by his celebrated Sermon, preached before the King, on *the Nature of the Kingdom or Church of Christ;* in which he insists that Christ is the sole lawgiver to his subjects, and the sole judge of their behavior in the affairs of conscience and eternal salvation; and that to set up any other authority in his kingdom, to which his subjects are indispensably and absolutely bound to submit their consciences or conduct in what is properly called religion, evidently destroys the rule and authority of Jesus Christ as king. These publications raised violent clamor and much calumny against the Bishop from the high church party, and produced an extraordinary number of sermons, charges, letters, and essays; wherein the several writers maintained their respective opinions on the nature of Christ's kingdom, the origin and extent of civil government, and the expediency or advantage of a religious test. Nor was it from the pens of private individuals only, that opposition to the Bishop of Bangor's sentiments emanated: his doctrines and positions were thought to give sufficient occasion for the exercise of that very authority against which he had so strongly protested: accordingly the subject was in the same year taken up very warmly by the lower House of Convocation, in which a

committed to Newgate. The avowed design was to prove, that ever since the Revolution, there has been a schism in the Church of England; that those only are of the true church, who have preserved their principles of loyalty to King James II. and his posterity; and that the others are schismatical, guilty of perjury, and by consequence *ipso facto*, deprived.' He was sentenced, March 2, 1717, to a fine of 500*l.*, to remain in prison three years, to be twice whipped, to be degraded and stripped of his gown by the executioner, which was done in court accordingly.—Calamy's Life, vol. ii. p. 358.

committee was appointed, with the Dean of Chichester at its head, to draw up a report concerning their tendency; which was declared to be,

First, 'to subvert all government and discipline in the church of Christ, and to reduce his kingdom to a state of anarchy and confusion.'

Secondly, 'to impugn and impeach the regal supremacy in causes ecclesiastical, and the authority of the legislature to inforce obedience in matters of religion by civil sanctions.'

These proceedings, however, were speedily stopped: 'the Convocation gaped, but could not speak;' for before the report could be brought into the Upper House, the whole assembly was prorogued by a special order of the King, into whose mind the principles of the Revolution were diligently instilled by his whig ministers; nor has it, since that period, ever been permitted to sit for the transaction of business.*

Such a measure as this tended but to inflame the controversy which had previously been commenced by Dr. Andrew Snape, the most intolerant and abusive of all the Bishop's adversaries, who was answered by Mr. Arthur Ashley Sykes, one of the most pertinacious disputants on the other side of the question. Dean Sherlock also, in vin-

* Whenever a new parliament is assembled, the Primate, with his Dean (the Bishop of London,) accompanied by other dignitaries, repair to St. Paul's. There they are joined by the civilians from Doctors Commons, and after the Liturgy has been read in Latin, they listen to a *Concio ad Clerum*. Then, after a benediction from the Archbishop, they form a procession to the Chapter-House; and when a Latin speech has been delivered by the Prolocutor of the Lower House, they vote an address to the king, and adjourn *sine die*.

dication of himself as a leader in Convocation, and chief author of the Report, published, very early in 1717, his *Remarks on the Bishop of Bangor's Treatment of the Clergy and Convocation*, which soon called forth from the pen of Mr. Sykes, *A Letter to Dr. Sherlock*, &c. *comparing the dangerous Positions and Doctrines contained in the Doctor's Sermon, preached Nov.* 5, 1712, *with those charged on the Bishop in the late Reports of the Committee*; in which extracts were produced from the Dean's own Discourse, by which it was attempted to be shown that he himself had rejected all temporal authority in the civil magistrate, and had in fact advanced the same doctrine regarding Christ's kingdom as that of the Bishop of Bangor. To this pamphlet the Dean replied, in *An Answer to a Letter sent to the Rev. Dr. Sherlock, relating to his Sermon*, &c.; which, being considered unsatisfactory, was met by *a Second Letter to Dr. Sherlock*, containing an Appendix relating to Dr. Snape, and a Postscript to Dr. Sherlock, *by the Bishop of Bangor* himself: in this his Lordship, having assured the Dean that he did not know of the former Letter addressed to him till after its publication, vindicates himself against the charge of 'writing down the magistrate's power in every case,' promises to undertake all necessary defence of himself; and at the same time declares his opponent to be 'a person of great abilities and weight, and one whom he could never persuade himself either to contemn or ridicule.' This publication again drew out Sherlock, whose reply was particularly directed to the Postscript; and thenceforward he chose to conduct the dispute with the principal, though he certainly was more concerned with the letter-writer, whom he designated as the 'second.'

After some more skirmishing, the Dean of Chichester,

seeing that the repeal of the Corporation and Test Acts was both directly and indirectly aimed at by the Bishop of Bangor and the Low Church party, applied all the powers of his acute intellect and legal knowlege, to show the expediency and justice of those enactments in his celebrated *Vindication;* a work which has continued from the time of its publication to possess a high reputation; and which, just before the laws in question were repealed by Parliament, drew from an able writer in one of our best periodicals, the following commendatory expressions:— 'If a discussion of this subject' (the repeal of the Test Laws) 'should be brought on, we have one request to make. It is, that no member of the Legislature will give a suffrage on the question, without previously perusing a small tract of Bishop Sherlock on this subject; a tract first drawn up in the Bangorian Controversy, and lately reprinted in a separate pamphlet. We care not if every thing be read over and over again, that was ever written against the Test Laws; but shall be amply satisfied if only this small treatise be read in their defence. Let a plain understanding, biassed by no prejudices, be brought to the discussion, and we shall have no fears as to the result.'— Quarterly Review, iv. 309.

Still, in this ingenious defence, the special pleading of an advocate appears sometimes mixed up with a candid inquiry after truth; nor can I withhold my humble tribute of approbation from the more dignified sentiments of those enlightened prelates of our own times, who withstood the profanation of a most holy rite, instead of attempting to retain the Sacramental Test, by professing, like Sherlock, to consider it not as a *qualification* for a civil office, but only as a *proof* of such qualification. The conclusion of this treatise, in which the Bishop of Bangor's sentiments

on *the condition and example of our Lord*, seem to have been rather misrepresented by the Dean in the zeal of controversy, confined the efforts of these two antagonists for a considerable time to this particular point: but it must not be supposed that the dispute was limited either to this point, or to these champions; on the contrary, it spread itself until it comprehended, in its various ramifications, near a hundred authors of note; among whom were some of the greatest names of which the age could boast. As the once powerful interest however which this controversy excited, is become almost extinct with the obnoxious statutes, all farther account of it may be spared, beyond a few general observations on the manner in which it was conducted, and the effects which it produced.

In the first place, then, I think we may fairly give credit to the principals on both sides for sincerity in the opinions which they advanced. Hoadley had on all occasions, from his first entrance into public life, advocated those principles which led finally to the abolition of the Test Acts; and though he may have carried his latitudinarian sentiments to an extent sometimes inconsistent with ecclesiastical discipline and authority, yet his arguments on these subjects are no more to be included in Dr. Snape's sweeping and unjustifiable assertion, that they *are hostile to all revelation*, than the prelate himself is to be stigmatised, on the authority of an anonymous author, as *a Dissenter and a Socinian in lawn*:* had he been this, he never would have been honored with the friendship, and defended by the pen, of the learned and amiable Dr. Balguy. With regard to Sherlock, he had imbibed high church and

* Quarterly Review, vol. iii. p. 362.

Tory principles from his father; and these he steadily asserted against the ruling powers, losing thereby the king's favor, who erased the name both of himself and of Dr. Snape from the list of court chaplains, and deferring his promotion to the episcopal bench to a period much later than that which his splendid talents and high character would, under other circumstances, undoubtedly have secured.

Nor was this controversy unfavorable to the cause of truth, or to just views of civil liberty. Dr. Disney is unquestionably right, when he asserts * that 'the nature of Christ's kingdom, and the proper province of the civil magistrate, became better understood when the question had been argued in all its various shapes by Hoadley, Sykes, Jackson, Pyle, and Balguy on the one side, and by Sherlock, Snape, Trapp, Hare, and Stebbing on the other.' Though the angry passions of some, and the fears of others, were violently agitated at the time, yet the minds of men, as they became enlarged, became also more tolerant, and the way was then paved for that great parliamentary measure of Abolition, of which the annual Act of Indemnity had gradually removed all fear.

In touching on the personal invectives introduced into this controversy, I must confess that the balance inclines greatly to the high church party. Dean Sherlock himself abounds in the asperities of language far beyond his episcopal antagonist, though his strict integrity has preserved him from descending to that disingenuous abuse and calumny which distinguishes some of his associates. It is however in the nature of things that the defender of any established system should deal in personalities more

* Life of Sykes, p. 81.

than he who attacks it: the object of the one is merely to subvert the establishment, which, from the very circumstance of its being generally professed, engages him in general observations: in fact he has no private animosity to gratify, and has therefore nothing to do with its individual professors: but, on the contrary, he who supports a system, feels his own honor and credit involved in it; he considers that his judgment and penetration are insulted, when the opinions which he has long held sacred are declared false; and being thus stimulated, he breaks out into bitter invective and personal sarcasms, which not unfrequently give an advantage to his more cool and philosophic opponent: and this is not unworthy of being kept in mind by all who engage in literary controversy for the defence of established opinions.

Soon after his labors in the Bangorian Controversy, Sherlock was engaged in answering a pamphlet put forth by Mr. Sykes in vindication of Bentley, to which allusion has been already made;* but he soon found himself relieved from this task by an able and willing advocate, the author of the feud himself, who brought his tremendous powers of sarcasm and invective to bear on his adversaries with a force that has been rarely equalled. Speaking on one occasion of Mr. Sykes, who had published his tracts anonymously, Middleton makes the following bitter, and I believe undeserved, reflexions on that gentleman:

'It was to little purpose for the author to conceal his

* The occasion of the dispute was a demand made by Dr. Bentley, as Divinity Professor, of an extraordinary fee of four guineas, at the creation of the Doctors by royal mandate, the day after the king's visit to the University.

name, for every soul who could get through a page or two, cried out presently, it must be Sykes:

Ubi ubi est, diu celari non potest.

'Nature, which in kindness to the world has set a mark on his countenance, has given us infallible ones of his productions. Wherever you find a writer surprisingly trifling and dull, glorying in never being in the right, discovering an antipathy to church and university, with a special malice to Dr. Sherlock, the principal champion and ornament of both, there's your man; pronounce it to be Sykes; you need not be afraid of counterfeits. When the work is too foul and scandalous for any other man to engage in, Sykes is a sure card that never fails his friends in distress.

Cum nemini obtrudi potest, itur ad me.

He always keeps himself in readiness for service; and like a famous lawyer I have heard of, can be advocate or evidence, as occasion requires; and, as a true dragoon, fights either a-foot or on horseback.'*

Yet it appears that Middleton afterwards changed his opinion of Mr. Sykes, and spoke of him in terms of great respect;† whilst he became one of Sherlock's bitterest theological opponents, when his own religious principles had undergone a change, and he had commenced his subtle attacks against the bulwarks of revealed religion.

Not long after this period, Sherlock's good offices were exerted with his friend Lord Townshend, in behalf of Dr. Colbatch, the great leader of the Anti-Bentleian party in

* Some remarks on a Pamphlet, p. 6

† Disney's Life of Sykes, p. 87.

Trinity College, for the purpose of screening him from the vindictive spirit which in those days contaminated the purity of our courts of judicature ;* and in 1723, he assisted this same gentleman in drawing up a return to a mandamus of the Court of King's Bench, showing cause why the great Aristarchus should not be restored to the degree of which he had been deprived by the University.†

But greater and more worthy subjects soon offered themselves to the ready pen of Sherlock. The celebrated Anthony Collins, whom Bentley has so severely handled in his Phileleutherus Lipsiensis, had lately published a work, intitled *a Discourse on the grounds and reasons of the Christian Religion,* wherein he endeavors to fix its evidence chiefly on the prophecies of the Old Testament, and then explains those prophecies in such a manner that they may seem to have no better foundation than Pagan divinations. This publication brought out many writers on the subject; and though the dean of Chichester did not enter directly into the controversy, yet he took occasion to deliver his sentiments in six discourses, at the Temple

* Colbatch had published a pamphlet intitled *Jus Academicum:* in this having inadvertently made some reflexions on the state of Law and Justice in England, which certainly at that time were not inappropriate, the crafty Aristarchus turned on him the full tide of judicial indignation, which had not as yet divested itself of the asperities and sarcasms, and I may add, revenge, that disgraced the characters of Judge Jeffreys and others of that era. See the Dean of Peterborough's Life of Bentley, (p. 478, &c.) a work, which, though it occasions a *painful* interest to the reader, from the profligacy which it necessarily exposes in almost all the public men of that day, is the finest refutation of the *laudator temporis acti* that can possibly be produced.

† Life of Bentley, p. 493.

church,* which he printed in the following year, under the title of 'The Use and Intent of Prophecy in the several Ages of the World.' As one of the main objects of his opponent was to separate the prophecies, and, by attacking each when isolated, to overthrow the authority of all, Sherlock, with peculiar propriety, deduces a regular and connected series from their earliest period, through their several ages, exhibiting them as subservient to one and the same administration of Providence, and showing that they cannot be the effect of art or religious fraud. †

* In the months of April and May, 1724.

† These Discourses ran through many editions. The fourth, corrected and enlarged, was published in 1744, with four Dissertations; three of which only appeared in the original edition. In 1749 the author, being then Bishop of London, published an Appendix to the Second Dissertation, being a further inquiry into the Mosaic account of the Fall. To this subject relate the two following letters from his Lordship to Dr. Grey, which I have extracted from the pages of the Gentleman's Magazine for 1790:

Temple, Feb. 11, 1748-9.

SIR,

I am obliged to you for communicating your papers to me relating to the Prophecy of Daniel and that on the Psalms. You have done justice to the thoughts I suggested to you, and I have no objection to the publication of them; but I ought to let you know how far I had gone in this matter.

Soon after the publication of my *Intent* of Prophecy, Mr. Collins wrote a book, and took notice of what I had said of the History of the Fall. I drew up an answer at the time, but did not publish it then, intending to add a Dissertation to some new edition of my book. I have not yet done it, and may perhaps have no time to do it; but I have sent you a copy of what I have said on this Prophecy with no intention to prevent your publishing your piece, which I am very willing you shall do. Your view is to explain the Prophecy

Two years had scarcely elapsed from the publication of these admirable Discourses, when their author obtained that station to which his eminent merits intitled him, and which served to call forth with increased alacrity and effect the energies of his powerful mind. In the first year

in general; mine is to show how the Prophecy at the Fall was understood.

I should say something to the Prophecy in the Psalms, but writing is uneasy to me. If you publish your piece, you shall be welcome to use, and you will do me great honor to use, any observations of mine.

I am, Sir, with sincere regard and respect for you, your very affectionate brother and humble servant,

THO. LONDON.

Dr. SHERLOCK to Dr. GREY.

Temple, June 27, 1749.

DR. GREY,

I came this morning out of the country, and am here only for two or three days on my way to Tunbridge. I have published a new edition of the book of Prophecy, and have added the new Dissertation I mentioned to you: I will order my bookseller to send you a complete copy. As to the particular texts from Genesis and the Psalms, I had rather have seen them under your name than my own; but you will judge how necessary a part they are of the new Dissertation, which I had promised and was expected. I have borrowed from you a reference to Boerhaave, which you will find at the bottom of one of the pages. Before August is quite spent I hope to be at Fulham, and nobody will be more welcome there than yourself. I find there is a very old bad house; I must repair a great deal of it, and, I am afraid, rebuild some part. It is late for me to be so employed, but somebody will be the better for it. I write with difficulty; I wish you can read.

I am, Sir, your very affectionate brother and humble servant,

THO. LONDON.

of George II, Dean Sherlock was advanced to the episcopal see of Bangor; and so high an opinion of his character and deserts had Queen Caroline, to whose notice he was recommended by Sir R. Walpole, that he would have been at once preferred to that of Norwich, had not ministers represented to her Majesty that such an arrangement would produce and justify complaints in all the other bishops.*

Soon after his promotion, we find Sherlock again stepping forth in the cause of revealed religion, and to repress the efforts of daring and licentious spirits. As Collins had endeavored to explain away the prophecies, so did Woolston, under the assumed character of a moderator in the controversy, attempt to allegorize the miracles, and thus

* The following article relating to this affair is extracted from Mr. Morrice's Correspondence with Dr. Friend, in Nichols's Lit. Anecdotes, Vol. V. p. 97.

January 2, 1727-8.

You observe rightly, that all things do not run in one channel as they did in the late reign; and that Sir Robert's influence in ecclesiastical affairs is at an end. Nor has the Archbishop of Canterbury any power in that matter. He imagined he should have the first week or fortnight of the new reign; and people thought so too: but he found his recommendations were disregarded, and so he has chose to sit still at Lambeth and tells every body he has no interest at court. The queen seems chiefly to manage that branch, though not absolutely; for she intended Dr. Hare for the bishoprick of Bath and Wells, and Dr. Sherlock for that of Norwich; but the whole Ministry united in their representations against it, alleging it would disoblige the whole Bench of Bishops to have the new-consecrated ones let into the best preferments at once; and to carry their point they put Wynne on taking Bath and Wells, for which it seems he made no application himself, and Baker on taking Norwich to disappoint Sherlock.

to destroy that great collateral branch of evidence. As the virulent attack of this sceptical writer was chiefly directed against the great miracle of the resurrection, Sherlock concentrated on this point his vast powers of defence, and produced, in 1729, a very ingenious treatise, intitled 'The Trial of the Witnesses of the Resurrection of Jesus;' in which, with singular felicity, he turns his great stores of legal knowlege to the purpose of an advocate pleading the cause in hand; and of a judge who has to decide on its evidence. The novelty, as well as the clever execution of this pamphlet, excited great applause, and caused it to run through fourteen editions in a very short time, when a taste for literature was far from being so universally diffused as it is in the present age. In 1749, 'A Sequel to the Trial' appeared; which was stated to have been revised, and perhaps was composed, by the same author.

Nor did Bishop Sherlock, though he dedicated much time to the defence of Christianity, and the duties of his diocese, neglect to display his shining talents on another theatre which now called them forth. As a peer of the realm, no less than a ruler of the church, he felt the responsibility of his station, as well as the extraordinary powers with which he was qualified to support it. By nature he possessed an acute and vigorous understanding; by education he had both strengthened the reasoning faculties and enlarged the varied stores of imagination; by an intimate association with the highest characters in the legal profession, as well as by constant study of the great principles or rudiments of law, he had acquired a profound knowlege of its general maxims, and a facility of applying them to any new case; and though he had no advantages from previous habits of extemporaneous speaking, yet had he

a natural flow of eloquence, and a steadiness of nerves, which the most practised speakers do not often acquire.

Under these circumstances, when he appeared as a Lord of Parliament, and assisted at its important deliberations on questions either of an ecclesiastical or political nature, he was not content to give a silent vote, but often took an active part in debates. Nor can it be matter of surprise, that he was listened to with great attention at all times, and that he not unfrequently led the House to its decision. His powers in this respect were manifested very soon after his admission into the Senate; for when the long-pending cause respecting the visitorial jurisdiction of the Bishop of Ely over Trinity College, was carried by a writ of error to the Lords, after having been decided against the Bishop, and in favor of Dr. Bentley, by the Court of King's Bench, Sherlock reasoned against this judgment with a power of argument that bore down all the efforts of its supporters: the judgment itself was reversed by a majority of 28 peers against 16, and the unexpected success of the day was attributed, by Bentley's prosecutors, mainly to the exertions of Bishop Sherlock.*

Even before this trial of his strength, he had contended with marked success against the famous Pension Bill,† which had been carried in the House of Commons by a majority of 10. This bill, which was the most popular and plausible of the measures proposed by Opposition, went to disable all persons from sitting in Parliament who held any pension or office under the Crown; and to bring every member to the test of an oath before he took his seat, that he did not enjoy such; or that if he accepted either, he would declare it to the House within fourteen days. It was generally

* Dean Monk's Life of Bentley, p. 592. † In 1731.

thought that Sir R. Walpole permitted this measure to pass the lower House, in order that he might avoid the popular indignation which would have adhered to him had it been rejected. To the great annoyance therefore of Lord Townshend, he threw this odium on the House of Lords, where it was negatived after a long debate, and a protest was entered by the extraordinary number of 26 peers. Sherlock spoke with great animation against the principle of the bill, regarding it as tending to diminish the influence of the Crown, and by that means to disturb the balance of the Constitution. One of his positions was, 'that an independent House of Commons, or an independent House of Lords, was as inconsistent with the Constitution, as an independent, that is, an absolute monarch.'

As the king was extremely averse to this measure, and indignant at its very proposal, it is probable that Sherlock's interest was not diminished in that quarter by his exertions, any more than with his patrons, Sir R. Walpole and Lord Townshend: to an opinion indeed which prevailed at the time against the purity of his motives, may be ascribed the origin of a motion that was very soon afterwards brought into the House, against the translation of bishops. I should however require stronger evidence before I consented to stigmatize so eminent a prelate for the part he took in this political debate. His Tory principles and his attachment to prerogative will sufficiently account for his conduct. The speech however made such a noise out of doors, that soon after the session, a justification of it was printed in the public newspapers, dated Cambridge, April 27, 1731: this was written by some particular friend of the Bishop, if not dictated by himself.*

* See Biograph. Brit. Suppl. p. 234. Note.

Nor were these the only occasions when he distinguished himself as a parliamentary orator. On many subjects wherein the civil, and especially the ecclesiastical establishment, was concerned, he declared his sentiments with great weight and authority; and in cases of ecclesiastical law brought before the Lords, he sometimes led their judgments, in opposition to the most distinguished members of the legal profession. His exertions however in opposition to one particular measure, were too important to be passed over in silence. During the time that he held the see of London, an attempt was made in Parliament to introduce a law, by which the rights of the parochial clergy would have been fundamentally affected; an attempt the more formidable, because it was encouraged and supported by persons of distinction in the government. This project was to settle a certain and invariable annual stipend on the clergy in lieu of tithes; but it was defeated, and the ancient rights of the church secured, by the spirited opposition raised against it, within and without doors, chiefly by the talent and influence of Bishop Sherlock.*

Yet all this time, while he was employed in Parliamen-

* His speeches on the following subjects are printed in the Collection of Debates in Parliament: against Lord Bathurst's motion, in May, 1733, for an account of the produce of the South Sea Directors' forfeited estates, in 1720: for a clause in the Mortmain Bill, in 1736, affecting the benefit of Queen Anne's bounty for the augmentation of small livings, but it was not carried: also in the same year against the bill for the more easy recovery of tithes from Quakers: likewise against the motion for declaring the sentence of the High Court of Justiciary against Captain Porteous, in 1737. He also made a long speech in favor of the convention with Spain, in 1738, and another against the bill for retailing spirituous liquors, in 1740.—Biblioth. Brit. Supp. p. 234.

tary business for the general good of his country, he still continued to preach to his congregation at the Temple during term, and in the vacation always went down to visit and reside in his diocese; where he spent his time in an exemplary manner; in a decent hospitality; in repairing many churches and houses; in conversing with his clergy; and in giving to them and to their people those directions which the circumstances of the times required.* In the distribution of his preferment, both in this and other dioceses over which he presided, he seems to have been guided by the most laudable motives; not only rewarding talent and exciting emulation, but encouraging the humble efforts of the lowly pastor, and preserving him from that poverty which is too often his lot in this world. His attention to that indigent though hard-working class of men, the Welsh curates, appears from the two following letters, which I have extracted from the Gentleman's Magazine. They are written to a worthy man at the very point of time when the Bishop was quitting his see of Bangor; and show that he did not forget his humble friend when he was himself advanced to a more splendid station. The successor to whom he alludes in these epistles, was Bishop Herring, with whom he became involved in a dispute when the latter was promoted to the metropolitan see of Canterbury.

Temple, Nov. 5, 1734.

MR. LLOYD,

I do assure you that I thought of you and your circumstances in Llanfrothen before I received your letter. I will make it my re-

* Dr. Nichols's Funeral Sermon in Gent. Mag. 1762. p. 24.

quest to the Bishop to provide a more comfortable living for you; and I hope I shall be able to recommend you to him with effect.

It is a concern to me whenever I think of the state of the clergy in the diocese, which I am now very soon to leave. I did what I could to help them, much less than I wished to do; and am sensible I have left many worthy clergymen but meanly provided. I should have left more so, if I had not withstood great importunities for the sake of those whom I judged deserving. I will not forget you; and though I leave the diocese, yet I hope the good opinion you have given me reason to have of you will not be altogether useless to you.

I am your humble servant,
THO. BANGOR.

March 15, 1739.

MR. LLOYD,

Immediately upon receiving yours, I applied to the Bishop of Bangor for you. I wish I could have succeeded in the present instance; but I found the Bishop had very kind intentions towards you, which he intends to acquaint you with himself: and therefore I have nothing to add but my good wishes for your success, and that I am your affectionate brother and humble servant,

THO. SARUM.*

Nor was it in this case only that he showed great care or penetration in the selection of proper objects for his patronage. It is not necessary to cite instances; but the reader may find many interspersed in the Literary Anecdotes of that indefatigable collector the late Mr. Nichols,† who bears ample testimony also to the Bishop's

* Gent. Mag. for 1790. p. 293. It is satisfactory to know that the application to Bishop Herring was successful, as he very soon afterwards presented Mr. Lloyd to the rectory of Llanfwrog.

† Vol. I. p. 658.—Vol. v. pp. 162. 354. 361. 709.—Vol. viii.

kind and charitable disposition.* In 1734 he succeeded his old antagonist Hoadley in the see of Salisbury; and during the time he held this bishopric, his talents became so fully known, and his character so duly appreciated, that on the death of Archbishop Potter in 1747, the highest dignity in the church was immediately offered to his acceptance. In 1741, the party of Frederick Prince of Wales, by combining their strenuous efforts with those of the opposition, succeeded in gaining a majority in the House against the measures, and in exciting just indignation throughout the county, against the corrupt influence of Sir Robert Walpole. Sherlock, however, in the House of Lords, took up the defence of his friend and patron, and by his advice, influence, and eloquence, procured a prorogation of Parliament for the purpose of screening the minister; by which measure he much exasperated the Prince and his party against him. Whether his conduct in this instance is to be commended for disinterestedness and discretion, or blamed for want of patriotism, each person must determine for himself; and each will probably be guided by the view he takes of party men and party measures in that troubled period. At any rate this act of the Bishop lays open his character to severe reprehension; and accordingly we find that it did not escape the lash of the satirist, who, in allusion to the obstruction thus thrown in the way of the Prince's

pp. 383. 440. 561. 568.—Vol. ix. pp. 528. 610.—He presented Cole, the celebrated antiquary, to the rectory of Hornsey in Middlesex; but it seems that the Bishop did not behave, as Cole thought, very kindly to him, and therefore he resigned it.—Vol. viii. p. 383.

* Vol. viii. p. 309.

measures, indignantly remarks, that

'S——k, if he lives, will love the Prince.
F. Strange spleen to S——k!
P. Do I wrong the man?
God knows I praise a courtier when I can.'*

In commenting on this passage, Dr. Warton asks, whether Pope, in thus publicly and wantonly holding up to ridicule an amiable man, and an exemplary and learned dignitary of the church, can seriously inquire whether or not 'he wrongs the man?' With all due deference to the learned commentator, I cannot see the propriety of the term 'wanton ridicule' in this instance. Sherlock's motives and conduct lay fairly open to any man's animadversion; and when amiable and learned dignitaries of the church plunge into the stormy sea of politics, it is not their amiability of character or their uncommon learning, which can or ought to defend their conduct from criticism, or from censure if deserved. With regard to the 'little wasp of Twickenham,' when we consider that his friend and patron Bolingbroke was moving the secret springs of Frederick's party at this time, and that Sherlock was an intimate friend, adviser, and defender of Whig ministers, whom he hated with no common aversion, we shall be surprised, not indeed that he drew out his sting, but that he did not inflict a deeper wound.

It has been already observed that, on the decease of Archbishop Potter, Sherlock might have ascended to the highest eminence in the church: this however he declined without hesitation, on account of the ill state of his health at that period. Hitherto he had felt himself equal to the duties of each place which he had filled: but now

* Pope's Epilogue to the Satires, Dial. ii. l. 61.

his apparently declining strength made him fear, lest, by accepting so exalted a station, he should only increase his cares and responsibility, without enlarging his sphere of usefulness. But the exertions of his powerful mind were not destined yet to cease. In the succeeding year, 1749, he rallied; and on the death of Dr. Edmund Gibson, accepted a translation to the arduous see of London.

On the duties of this important office he entered with his usual vigor and alacrity; and in this same year he published that edition of his Discourses on Prophecy, which excited Dr. Middleton to attack them with great virulence in his 'Examination;' who proved in this instance the truth of a common observation, that no one is a bitterer foe than he who has once been a friend to the person assailed. Nor does it tell well for Middleton's candor and ingenuousness, that his hostility against Sherlock's theological opinions, took its origin from personal pique and private malevolence. According to his own showing it arose merely from resentment, because he thought the Bishop had opposed his election to the mastership of the Charter House, on account of the sceptical views which he had introduced into his letter to Dr. Waterland on the miraculous powers. But even in this he seems to have erred; since the Bishop interfered no farther than to give an answer to Sir R. Walpole, when pressed to declare his opinion whether the appointment would be relished or not by the clergy. Archbishop Potter and Bishop Gibson seem to have been the persons who most effectually opposed his advancement.* When Middleton descends to personal invective and abuse against an old associate and friend, whom he had once complimented on the very work

* Encyclop. Brit. Suppl. p. 231. note D.

in question, even this is sufficiently derogatory to a scholar and a gentleman; but the folly and the crime become much more serious when such an one allows resentment for injuries, real or supposed, from weak and fallible men, to urge him on to hostilities against revealed religion. 'Had he had,' says Bishop Warburton, 'I will not say, piety, but greatness of mind enough not to suffer the pretended injuries of some churchmen to prejudice him against religion, I should love him living, and honor his memory when dead. But, good God! that man, for the discourtesies done him by his miserable fellow-creatures, should be content to divest himself of the true *viaticum*, the comfort, the solace, the asylum from all the evils of life, is perfectly astonishing.'* The following observations of the same learned prelate to his correspondent Mr. Hurd, respecting Middleton's virulent examination of the Discourses on Prophecy, are too interesting and important to be withheld from the reader's notice.

'Your last favor of the 23rd instant was sent me hither from Prior-Park, which I left about ten days ago, and whither I propose to return in about a fortnight. We agree intirely in our sentiments about the examination. I think it the weakest as well as warmest pamphlet the Dr. ever wrote. But I agree with you there is no harm done. It may be of use to make people understand themselves. I disagree with the Dr. in his two general questions. The first, that there is no system of prophecy, but only particular, detached, unrelated prophecies. His reason is, that Christ and his Apostles refer only to such. By the same kind of reasoning I could prove there is no system of morals, because Christ and his Apostles recommend and inforce only particular and detached virtues occasionally. But is not the reason of this evident enough? They had

* Letter to Hurd, July 11, 1750.

to do with the common people, who cannot comprehend or attend to a long deduction or chain of things. They can only see simple truths, and it is well they can see them. Take a plain man with an honest heart, give him his Bible, and make him conversant in it, and I will engage for him he will never be at a loss to know how to act, agreeably to his duty, in every circumstance of life. Yet give this man a good English translation of Aristotle's Ethics, (one of the most complete works for method in its kind,) and by the time he has got to the end of it, I dare say he will not understand one word he has been reading. But is the explanation of the economy of grace, in which is contained the system of prophecy, that is, the connexion and dependance of the prophecies of the several ages of the church of God, therefore of no use? Surely the greatest. And I am confident nothing but the light which will arise from thence can support Christianity under its present circumstances. But the contending for single prophecies only, and by a man who thinks they relate to Christ in a secondary sense only, and who appears to have no high opinion of second senses, looks very suspicious. What would one think of an advocate at the bar, who, when the contrary party had made out his point by a number of various circumstances that supported and threw light on one another, should reply and say, you are a maker of fanciful hypothesis? you have brought all these various unrelated circumstances into a body or a system: but you should consider them as separate and distinct, for so they were delivered in at the bar by the witnesses? If the Doctor ever considers these prophecies, as he seems to promise he will, I perhaps shall have something to say to him. The other point is the Fall. It is managed just in the manner you say,—He will have it to be an allegory. I agree it is so. In this we differ,—He supposes it to be an allegory of a moral truth, namely, that man soon corrupted his ways; and seems to think, by his way of speaking, that an allegory can convey no other kind of information. I say it is an allegory of a *moral fact*, namely, that man had transgressed that positive command, (whatever it was,) on the observance of which the free gift of immortality was conditionally given. In this interpretation Christianity has something to bottom itself on. On the Doctor's notion it is a mere castle in the air. But I do not pretend you should understand what I mean, till you see it

developed in my Discourse of the Nature of Christianity, which makes the IXth Book of the Div. Leg. But on this point the Doctor's and the Bishop's notions are not very different, though controversy has kept them at a distance.*

Sherlock, at his first entrance into the see of London, had a dispute with Archbishop Herring concerning the right of *options*. That which was selected by his Grace in this instance was the valuable rectory of St. George's, Hanover Square, the incumbent of which, Dr. Trebeck, was very old and infirm. The Bishop, vexed at being deprived of one his best pieces of preferment, drew up a pamphlet on the subject, and for a while determined to oppose the claim; but at length a compromise took place, and the Archbishop consented to accept of St. Anne's, Soho, instead of St. George's.† This was submitted to by the Bishop; but in 1755 he printed his opinions in a folio pamphlet, though he did not think proper to publish them; and this was afterwards reprinted by Archbishop Herring, in 4to. for his friends, with a short answer by Mr. Joddrell and Archdeacon Denne.‡

* Warburton and Hurd's Correspondence, Letter xvii. Jan. 30, 1749–50.

† Fifty copies only were struck off for those that were interested in the subject: a copy was presented to each of the Advocates in Doctors Commons.—Nichols's Lit. Anecd. vol. ix. p. 311.

‡ Having never seen either of these pamphlets, and having been obliged to compose this biography by fits and starts, far removed from my literary resources, and in the midst of a severe domestic affliction, I am totally unprepared to enter into the merits of the question, though I conceive that many who have hitherto touched on it, have deviated from the main point by arguing from hearsay. A curious and interesting letter on the subject from Dr. Nathaniel Forster to the Archbishop is published by Nichols in his Lit. Anecdotes, vol. ix. p. 297.

Bishop Sherlock however soon had an opportunity of shining in his proper sphere, and effecting more good than he could expect to produce by controversy. In the month of February, 1750, a violent shock of an earthquake, which had been, as it were, announced by some remarkable coruscations of aurora borealis, with tremendous tempests of thunder, lightning, hail, and rain, greatly terrified the inhabitants of the metropolis: and this terror was redoubled by a similar phenomenon, on the very same day of the following month, between five and six in the morning. The shock was immediately preceded by a succession of thick low flashes of lightning, and a rumbling noise like that of a heavy carriage rolling over a hollow pavement: its vibrations shook every house from top to bottom, and in many places the church-bells were heard to strike; people started naked from their beds, and ran to their doors and windows in a state of distraction; yet no house was overthrown and no life was lost. However the periodical recurrence of the shocks, and the superior violence of the second, made a deep impression on the minds of the more ignorant and superstitious part of the community; who began to fear lest another such visitation might be attended with more dismal consequences. These sentiments of terror and dismay soon spread, and were augmented to an extraordinary degree by a fanatical soldier, who went about the streets preaching up repentance, and boldly prophesying that another shock on the same day in April would lay the mighty Babylon in ruins. 'Considering the infectious nature of fear and superstition,' says the historian,* and the emphatic manner in which the imagination had been prepared and prepossessed, it was no

* Smollett in his History of England: reign of George II.

wonder that the prediction of this illiterate enthusiast should have contributed in a great measure to augment the general terror. The churches were crowded with penitent sinners; the sons of riot and profligacy were overawed into sobriety and decorum. The streets no longer resounded with execrations or the noise of brutal licentiousness; and the hand of charity was liberally opened. Those whom fortune had enabled to retire from the devoted city, fled to the country with hurry and precipitation; insomuch that the highways were encumbered with horses and carriages. Many who had in the beginning combated these groundless fears with the weapons of reason and ridicule, began insensibly to imbibe the contagion, and felt their hearts fail in proportion as the hour of probation approached: even science and philosophy were not proof against the unaccountable effects of this communication: in after ages it will hardly be believed that on the evening of the 8th day of April, the open fields that skirt the metropolis were filled with an incredible number of people assembled in chairs, in chaises, and coaches, as well as on foot, who waited in the most fearful suspense, until morning and the return of day disproved the truth of the dreaded prophecy. Then their fears vanished; they returned to their respective habitations in a transport of joy; were soon reconciled to their abandoned vices, which they seemed to resume with redoubled affection; and once more bade defiance to the vengeance of heaven.'

The Bishop of London took advantage of the peculiar state of feeling into which the public mind had been forced by these extraordinary events, to address 'a Pastoral Letter to the Clergy and Inhabitants of London and Westminster, on occasion of the late Earthquakes.' This was bought up and read with such avidity by all ranks of

people, that more than 100,000 copies were sold within a month. A tract also which he composed on the observance of Good Friday is said to have had great effect, in a moral and religious point of view. Nor would it be right if we omitted to mention his admirable Charge, the only one he published,* which he printed and distributed among his clergy in 1759, and in which a profound knowlege of the law, both of church and state, is applied with paternal affection to their use and service. It is thus noticed by that eminent critic, Mr. Jonathan Toup, at a time when it excited a considerable controversy, and some illiberal feeling against its author:—'The Bishop of London's late charge against non-residence is such a masterly, sensible, and seasonable piece, that it deserves the attention of every clergyman; nay, I could wish that every parish would get a copy of it, to be kept in the vestry-room, for the service and inspection of future incumbents; for I am of the same opinion with the author of a late spirited letter to the Bishop of E— that the residence of the clergy is absolutely necessary to the well-being of Christianity. The apology which Dr. —— has lately published in answer to the Bishop of London, is not properly an apology for the clergy, but an apology for a set of worthless, insignificant ecclesiastics, who scarce deserve the name of clergymen; who, instead of residing on their proper cures, where they are in duty and con-

* It appears that he was able to make only one general visitation of his diocese in person, on account of his growing infirmities: 'though certain it is,' says Dr. Nichols, 'that for the first three or four years he applied himself closely to business, &c.: nay, he extended his care to parts abroad, and began his correspondence there, which would have been very useful to the church, if his health had permitted him to carry it on.'—Funeral Sermon.

science bound to reside, and living decently and hospitably in their several parishes, are idling away their time in borough-towns, and busying themselves there about matters which do not concern them.'*

With all his dignities, Bishop Sherlock had still kept possession of his favorite piece of preferment, the Mastership of the Temple, residing and preaching there during Term, and enjoying its beloved and long-cherished society. But in the year 1753,† when his increasing infirmities rendered him incapable of performing the functions of this office, he resigned it with the following letter of acknowlegement, which was received by those to whom it was addressed, with mingled feelings of admiration and regret:—

To the Treasurers, &c. of the two Societies of the Temple.

Fulham, Nov. 5, 1753.

Gentlemen,

His Majesty having been graciously pleased (in consideration of my age and infirmities) to accept of my resignation of the mastership of the Temple, permit me to take the opportunity of your meeting, after the recess of the vacation, to return you my thanks for your great goodness to me, during the continuance of the long course of my ministry among you. It would be a satisfaction and pleasure to me to acknowlege these obligations, and to express the sense I have of them, in person. But as I cannot promise myself, in the uncertain state of my health, that I shall be able to do it in proper time, I shall beg leave to do it by writing; and to assure you, that I shall always remember the many instances of your favor to me, some of which were so distinguishing marks of your approbation of my services, as I must never—I can never forget; and yet,

* Nichols's Lit. Anecd. vol. ii. p. 342.

† Even in 1751 he was obliged to use an amanuensis, as he informs Dr. Parsons, an eminent physician of that day, in a letter published by Nichols in his Lit. Anecdotes, vol. v. p. 480.

to mention them particularly, might be construed as an effect rather of vanity than of gratitude. I esteem my relation to the two societies to have been the greatest happiness of my life, as it introduced me to the acquaintance of some of the greatest men of the age, and afforded me the opportunities of improvement, by living and conversing with gentlemen of a liberal education, and of great learning and experience.

I am Gentlemen,
Your most obedient,
and most humble servant,
THOMAS LONDON.

But it was not for long that the Bishop's bodily weakness permitted him to exercise the active duties of his episcopal charge. About this time it pleased God to afflict him with a dangerous illness, by which, though he recovered from it, he almost lost the total use of his limbs, and was so far deprived of his speech, as to be unable to enjoy the advantages of a free conversation.* Yet his mind partook of none of these infirmities—he still attended to the punctual dispatch of business, giving directions, dictating letters whenever the importance of the case required it, and demanding from all whom he employed, an exact account of their various transactions. 'Under all his infirmities,' says Dr. Nichols, 'his soul broke through, like the sun from the cloud, and was visible to every eye. There was a dignity in his aspect and countenance to the very last. His reason sat enthroned within him; and no one could approach him without having his mind filled with that respect and veneration which was due to so great a character.'

It was under the last stage of bodily decay, with the retention of his powerful faculties and discriminative judg-

* Dr. Nichols's Funeral Sermon, Gent. Mag. 1762. p. 24.

ment, that he revised and published those admirable Sermons, which stand foremost among the brightest ornaments of our theological literature; and of which I conceive this to be a striking characteristic, that they make it evident by irresistible arguments, that the doctrines discussed are consistent with *sound sense*, and that religion in its various details is not contrary to reason, but, in fact, highly *rational*. In 1755 and 1756, he published four volumes of these Discourses in octavo; to which a fifth was added in 1776, when their author was no more.*

Death seemed as if he delayed to strike this great and good man, allowing him to continue in the uninterrupted exercise of his mental powers, until he saw the accession of our late revered monarch; when, unable as he was personally to approach the throne, he addressed the following beautiful letter of condolence and congratulation to him who so auspiciously ascended it:—

November 1, 1760.

SIRE,

Amidst the congratulations that surround the throne, permit me to lay before your Majesty a heart, which, though oppressed with age and infirmity, is no stranger to the joys of my country. When the melancholy news of the late king's demise reached us, it naturally led us to consider the loss we had sustained, and upon what

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* This contains his fourteen occasional Sermons, and was undertaken at the suggestion of Mr. Southgate, Curate of St. Giles's, who furnished the copies. The publishers were those two eminent bibliopoles, *Lockyer Davies* and *Thos. Davies*, whose initials D.D. are subscribed to the Preface.—Nichols's Lit. Anecd. vol. iii. p. 214. His Sermons were translated into French by the celebrated Pere Houbigant, his Discourses on Prophecy, and his Trial of the Witnesses, having received the same compliment from the pen of Le Moine.

our hopes of futurity depended. The first part excited grief, and put all the tender passions into motion; but the second brought life and spirit with it, and wiped away the tears from every face. Oh! how graciously did the providence of God provide a successor, able to bear the weight of government in that unexpected event! You, Sir, are the person whom the people ardently desire: which affection of theirs is happily returned by your Majesty's declared concern for their prosperity; and let nothing disturb this mutual consent. Let there be but one contest between them, whether the king loves the people best, or the people him: and may it be a long, a very long contest! may it never be decided, but let it remain doubtful! and may the paternal affection on the one side, and the filial obedience on the other, be had in perpetual remembrance! This will probably be the last time I shall ever trouble your Majesty. I beg leave to express my warmest wishes and prayers on your behalf. May the God of heaven and earth have you always under his protection, and direct you to seek his honor and glory in all you do; and may you reap the benefit of it by an increase of happiness in this world and in the next!'

At length the summons came; when this illustrious prelate, well prepared to answer it, resigned his soul into the hands of his Maker, on the 18th of July, 1761, at the advanced age of 84. He was buried at Fulham, not in the church, but in the *church-yard;* exhibiting an example, like many other prelates of this see,* which is well worthy of observation in this church-defiling age. A monument is erected to his memory, on which the following epitaph is inscribed:—

In this vault is deposited the body of
The Right Reverend Father in God
Dr. Thomas Sherlock, late Bishop of this Diocese,
formerly Master of the Temple, Dean of Chichester,
and Bishop of Bangor and Salisbury.

* Compton, Robinson, Gibson, Hayter, Osbaldiston, Terrick, Lowth, and Randolph.—Lit. Anecd. vol. ix. p. 505.

Whose beneficent and worthy conduct
in the several high stations which he filled,
entitled him to the gratitude of multitudes,
and the veneration of all.
His superior genius,
his extensive and well-applied learning,
his admirable faculty and unequalled power of reasoning,
as exerted in the explanation of Scripture,
in exhortations to that piety and virtue
of which he was himself a great example,
and in defence especially of Revealed Religion,
need no encomium here.
They do honor to the age wherein he lived; and
will be known to posterity, without the help
of this perishable monument of stone.

Underneath, on another tablet, is this:

He died the 18th day of July, in the year
of our Lord 1761, and the 84th of his age,
the powers of his mind continuing unimpaired
throughout a tedious course of
bodily infirmities,
which he sustained to the last with a most cheerful
and edifying resignation to the will of God.

The side of a monument, to the memory of his lady, placed on the top of the above-mentioned tablet, is thus inscribed.

Judith Fountaine,
was married to Dr. Thomas Sherlock,
Master of the Temple, August 8, 1707;
Died July 23, 1764; aged 77.

Bishop Sherlock died without issue, and left a large fortune behind him, not, as some have asserted,* shamefully amassed out of the see of London, but principally saved

* Among others, Dr. King, in the 'Anecdotes of his own Times,' p. 183.

from his own private resources; for he received a considerable sum from his father, which was greatly augmented by the testamentary disposal of his elder brother's fortune: neither is it true, as others have declared,* that he left the palace at Fulham in a bad condition, though it is very true that he found it so. In fact, his present worthy successor informs me, in a letter dated January 27, 1830, that he built a dining-room there (which is now the kitchen) with bed-rooms over it. To his lady, who survived him, Bishop Sherlock bequeathed 3000*l.* per annum for her life, and 10,000*l.* at her own disposal. The rest of his property, with the reversion of his widow's income, after certain bequests, devolved on his nephew, Sir Thomas Gooch. It seems that he was neither deficient in the virtue of charity during his life, nor unmindful of those who had any claim on him at his death; for as his piety was constant and exemplary, his zeal in establishing the great truth of Christianity warm and fervent, so, says Dr. Nichols,† was his munificence and his charity large and diffusive. It appears that he gave great sums of money to the corporation of clergymen's sons, to several of the hospitals, and to the Society for propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts. Indeed at the instance of this same Society, he printed at his own charge an impression of 2000 copies of his valuable Discourses, which were sent to all the islands and colonies of America. To his old college of Catherine Hall, the place of his education, he left his valuable library of books, with an estate at Congeston, in the county of Leicester,‡

* The Rev. C. Godwyn, in a letter to Mr. Hutchins, says that he died worth 120,000*l.*, and left the palace at Fulham in very bad condition.—Lit. Anecd. vol. viii. p. 227. On this point see his letter to Dr. Grey, p. xlvii.

† Funeral Sermon.

‡ This estate was subsequently exchanged for one at Nether

for a library fund, on which a salary of 20*l.* per annum is charged for the pay of a librarian. He also left an estate at Therfield, in Cambridgeshire, to found a scholarship, which must be given to the master's sizar. When he resigned his headship of Catherine Hall, Dr. Crosse, the senior fellow, a person whom Sherlock disliked, was elected to succeed him, for no other reason but that a senior might be removed out of the way; and this probably was the reason why he neglected his college in the disposal of his preferment. 'Besides the above-mentioned, and other public instances of his charity, the private flow of his bounty to many individuals was constant and regular: on all just occasions he was ever ready to stretch forth his hand towards the needy and afflicted; of which no one,' continues Dr. Nichols, 'can bear testimony better than myself, whom he often employed as the distributor of it.' This is evidence which must overbalance a thousand insinuations of those who judge only from hearsay, or perhaps, still worse, from the suggestions of their own imagination. To his servants it is said that he was a kind master, knowing how to reward fidelity and diligence; especially in those who had been long in his service. They were careful over him, and he remembered their care, by leaving a large sum among those who had been nearest about him during his illness.*

If he had failings (and who is there without them?) they were those which generally attach themselves to the greatest minds: he was ambitious; but he directed his ambition to noble purposes: he was irritable in his temper; but he generally corrected this defect, oftentimes

Wittacre, in the county of Warwick, which at present brings in 110*l.* per annum.

* Funeral Sermon.

under circumstances of considerable difficulty, by the strength of his religious principles; he may also have exhibited sometimes a little pride; but it was not towards his inferiors. These then are but specks, scarcely to be distinguished in the bright radiance of his character: nor ought we in any case to be too severe in animadverting on the slight defects which attach themselves to the spirits of great and good men not yet made perfect. Let us rather learn to imitate their virtues, and aim at the high reward which awaits the good and faithful servants of their Lord.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE I.

JOHN, CHAP. VI.—VERSES 67—69.

PART I.

THREE reasons for the constancy and adherence of the disciples to Christ: (I.) the miserable condition of those who should forsake him, having no other in whom they could trust; (II.) the excellency of his religion, and the means afforded by it for obtaining eternal happiness; (III.) his authority and divine commission, as a ground of confidence and faith. These three reasons referred to three general principles or maxims: (1.) that religion, which is the only means of true happiness and perfection in the present circumstances of the world, does not depend on human reasoning or invention; we cannot learn it from ourselves or others: (2.) the great end of religion is future happiness; consequently the best religion is that which most surely directs us to it: (3.) the authority and word of God is the only sure foundation of religion and reasonable ground of our hopes. First head considered: the necessity of religion in general is taken for granted; the only question is, from what source we must derive it: improvements which the gospel has introduced into the world stated: sceptics of the present age are apt to refer these to natural religion: this pretence examined and shown to be false: men are chiefly indebted to the gospel even for that natural religion which they boast of: the question then put—is there no such thing as natural religion? Answered by an exposition of the state of mankind under it, (which is not

to be estimated by a few bright examples, while millions are left in ignorance and vice:) also by a comparison of it with the gospel revelation; which latter was given to restore human nature and deliver reason from bondage by grace. Conclusion—the bad return made for so great a blessing by those who set up reason and nature in opposition to it. The success of such an attempt however will not be greater than its wisdom and piety.

PART II.

Second head considered: religion shown to be founded in the principles of reason and nature; hence it must be formed with a view of securing our future happiness: that therefore is the best religion which will most surely conduct us to the end proposed: the nature of religion enlarged on: eternal happiness out of our own power; it is the gift of God alone: if eternal life therefore be the end of religion, and likewise the gift of God, religion is nothing but the means of obtaining from God this most excellent gift: thus far all religions that have appeared in the world are shown to agree: from this account of the nature of religion, that it is to know the living God and to serve him acceptably, some consequences follow—first, since to please God and to act according to the will of God are but one and the same thing, that must be the most perfect religion which instructs us best in the knowlege of his will: defect of reason and nature in this point of view—secondly, it is wrong to compare natural religion and revelation together, for the purpose of inquiring which is preferable; for this is to inquire whether we know God's will better than he himself knows it. Since revelation must needs be the surest guide in religion, every man is bound to consider its pretensions when offered to him: this inquiry excluded by those who argue against all revelation, *à priori*, as inconsistent with God's wisdom. Sum of the argument against revelation *à priori* stated—viz. *that God, having given to us reason, has bound us*

to obey its dictates, and will judge us by its rule; otherwise he would have given an imperfect rule, which is inconsistent with his wisdom: but, the rule being sufficient, revelation must be useless and impertinent, and therefore not derived from God: moreover, as reason and natural religion never yet prevailed universally, it must be supposed that whatever happens in the world is designed by God, and those who have least reason are in that state for which he designed them; it is therefore absurd to suppose a revelation would be given to take them out of that state.—On this argument four observations are briefly made; involving—1. the principle that the creature is always bound to obey the Creator:—2. that human reason cannot be said to be *absolutely*, but only *relatively* perfect, as a rule; and it is begging the question to suppose there is no other rule but reason given; which must be proved, not supposed:—3. to add to a law once considered perfect as a rule, when an alteration of circumstances requires it, is oftentimes the effect of wisdom and necessity:—4. to say that revelation is unnecessary because reason is a perfect rule, and yet to affirm that those who have an imperfect use of reason have need of a revelation, is a contradiction; again to say, that those who are in such a state that they do not and cannot obey the laws of reason, are yet in such a state as God designed for them, is not only making God the author of evil, but ascribing to him two inconsistent intentions: we do not argue now in behalf of any particular revelation: this alone is urged, that revelation is the surest foundation of religion: hence it is incumbent on every man of sense and reason to inquire whether there be a revelation or no: for the precepts of natural religion cannot be taken into consideration until it be certain that there is no revelation to guide us; there can be no comparison made to determine our choice; for the revelation must be rejected, before natural religion can pretend to take the lead: the beaten but false path, which unbelievers tread, explained: the conclusion of their reasonings shown to be—that

because there may be a false revelation, there cannot be a true one: application of what has been said to the Christian revelation: its pretensions are worthy of the deepest consideration: reasons given why such pretensions are not to be turned off with general and loose observations: neglect of this consideration shown to be inexcusable: want of sincerity in religious professions, and desire of salvation, give a wrong turn to controversies about religion: different conduct is pursued with respect to those worldly objects which we highly value: concluding exhortation.

PART III.

There cannot be a fairer trial of any religion than a consideration of its efficacy in leading us to eternal life, which is the end of all religion: the difficulty is, how to apply this rule so as to direct our choice, since all religions pretend *to have the words of eternal life:* our object therefore must be to enable ourselves to determine, which are, and which are not, *words of eternal life.* Some principles in all religions are allowed, which may help our determination: such are these—that life eternal can be had only from God; and that from him the only way to obtain it is to live agreeably to his holy will; whence it follows, that since to do God's will is the only way to obtain eternal life, the words which instruct us in the knowlege of his will must be *the words of eternal life:* when therefore we inquire from what principle we ought to derive our religion, we do in truth inquire from what we may best derive our knowlege of God's will, since this is the true measure of our religious obedience. Two ways only by which we can arrive at this knowlege: one, by following the dictates of reason and nature; the other, by learning it either from God's own declaration, or from persons sufficiently authorised by him, which is what we call revelation. Between these two general principles, it is no hard matter to judge which is the safest: as nature is a better

guide than any pretended revelation, so every true revelation, as far as it goes, is better than nature: absurd to compare natural religion and revelation together, as considered in themselves: since, if the revelation be false, no arguments are necessary to make it yield to nature; if true, none can be sufficient. On the same principle other general objections against the gospel of Jesus Christ examined: its methods of salvation, which human sagacity cannot fathom, are matters of complaint with unbelievers: they think it unreasonable that God should propose such as objects of faith, and from this presupposed unreasonableness conclude they were not of God's contrivance, but the tricks of impostors: this objection, however, is opposed to all revelation in general, considered as a principle of religion, which adds any thing to what reason teaches us: the question then will be—can it be reasonable for God to propose any articles of faith or conditions of salvation, the reason and propriety of which do not appear to man? This the case of the gospel. In the sense of the gospel, what is a mystery and what is not: it must be remembered that not human reason, but God's will is the rule and measure of religious obedience; and therefore the terms of it must be tried by their agreement with God's will rather than the narrow compass of man's reason. If reason can by any means discover that the conditions of salvation proposed to us are the will of God, its work is over, and we are bound to use the means prescribed in order to obtain the desired end: and how little soever reason may be able to penetrate into mysteries, yet if it can discover them indeed to be the mysteries of God, and proposed by him as terms of salvation, it discovers to us that these mysteries are *the words of eternal life;* and what more does a man look for in his religion? This, it may be said, is true, on the supposition that God requires the belief of mysteries; but how does this prove it reasonable for him so to do? Certain allowances being made on each side, the question is reduced to this—whether it can ever

be necessary to reveal mysteries, in order to perfect the salvation of mankind? whenever it is necessary, it must be reasonable, unless it be unreasonable for God to save the world. Nature of a mystery stated: no real or positive thing in nature, but merely negative with respect to ourselves: what the complaint against mysteries amounts to shown. Return to the question, whether it can be ever necessary for God to use such means for the salvation of the world, the agreeableness of which to the end proposed human reason cannot discover: this shown to be necessary by various arguments, particularly by the difficulty of reconciling it with the wisdom and justice of God so freely to pardon sin as not to leave the marks of his displeasure on it, and vindicate in the face of creation the honor of his laws and government: no religion but that which is able to adjust these difficulties can have *the words of eternal life:* mysteries are so far from being an objection to the gospel, that without a mystery it is impossible for us to be saved: a religion without them might serve for this life, since they are not necessary parts of religion considered only as a rule of action; but they are most necessary when considered as means of obtaining pardon and eternal glory.

PART IV.

Religion acting on the soul, compared with a regimen necessary for the body—one sort proper for a sound constitution, and another for repairing a broken one: an innocent man has nothing to do but to preserve his innocency, which is his title to God's favor; his religion therefore is only a rule of life, and there is no room in it for mystery; but on the supposition of mankind becoming sinful and liable to God's wrath, religion itself becomes a new thing. Unbelievers may think that too much is required to believe *that all are sinners and are fallen short of the glory of God:* but this is the principle on which

the gospel uniformly proceeds, and on this it must be judged. Three things, necessary to be done for a sinner in order to restore him to eternal life, considered: 1st, that God be reconciled to him: 2dly, that he be purged from the impurity of sin: 3dly, that for the future he be enabled to obey God's holy laws: necessity of these conditions briefly shown. Allowing them to be necessary, and likewise that religion must contain *the words* or means *of eternal life*, it follows that the sinner's religion must contain the means of fulfilling these conditions: our notion therefore of such a religion is very imperfect, when we consider it only as a rule of action: as far as a rule of action is necessary, the gospel is shown to have it in the strictest sense of the words, and in the purest form: but a rule of life is not the only notion of religion: according to the other ideas which belong to it, it is not necessarily absurd if supposed mysterious: examined in this point of view with reference to the first of the three conditions above-mentioned, or as containing the means by which God is reconciled to sinners. Though we cannot practise a law without understanding it, yet God may be reconciled to us without our comprehending every thing done for that purpose, as a malefactor may receive and profit by a pardon, without knowing what induced his prince to grant it: if a sinner could not receive mercy unless he comprehended all the reasons of it, then only would it be necessary for religion to exclude all mysteries: since the knowlege of the essence of things, and that of the existence of things, are quite distinct, our ignorance of the latter can be no argument against our belief in the former: this explained more fully. The argument carried still further; it being shown that this part of religion must necessarily be mysterious, and the means of reconcilement such as reason and nature cannot comprehend. Reason challenged to discover any means of reconcilement, if these certain and allowed principles be laid down—viz. that it is just for God to punish sinners, and that God can do nothing

but what is just: difficulty must ever remain as long as we attempt to scan the divine justice by our narrow conceptions of it: and this it is which occasions many things in the gospel to be mysterious. To redeem the world is the work of God only: he alone could find the means, and apply them: religion founded on redemption must consist of two parts—viz., an account of the redemption wrought by God, and instructions to men on what terms they may reap its benefits: as far as our own part in the gospel goes there is nothing mysterious; we know how to act: as to the other parts of it, we are not required to comprehend and account for the means of salvation, but only to accept them: mysteries of God in redemption compared with his wonderful and mysterious works of creation, in which his ways are past finding out: strange that salvation should be the only instance in which men refuse mercy because they cannot understand the methods of obtaining it. The other two points, viz., the cleansing sinners from their iniquity, and the enabling them to live virtuously for the future, are omitted, because the same arguments will apply to them, *mutatis mutandis*. Conclusion—the only fair way of appreciating the gospel, is to consider the true state of mankind in the world.

DISCOURSE I.

JOHN, CHAP. VI.—VERSES 67—69.

Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.

PART I.

In the foregoing part of this chapter we read that the doctrine of our Saviour had given such offence to his hearers, that many even of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him: on which occasion our Saviour put this question to the twelve, 'Will ye also go away?' To which St. Peter, in the name of all, made answer, 'Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.' In this answer there are three things expressed, or implied, as the ground of their constancy and adherence to Christ.

I. The first is, The miserable condition they should be in, if they did forsake him, having no other in whom they could trust; 'Lord, to whom shall we go?'

II. The second is, The excellency of his religion, and the certain means it afforded of obtaining that which is the great end of religion, a blessed life after this: 'Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

III. The third is, The authority and divine commission of Christ, on which their faith and confidence were built: 'We believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the

living God.' To believe, because we have sufficient reason to determine our belief, is a rational faith; and this is what is meant in the word ἐγνώκαμεν, 'we believe;' because we have, from the things we have heard and seen of you, determined with ourselves, 'That thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.'

These three reasons, which St. Peter gives for adherence to Christ, refer to as many general principles or maxims:

As first, That religion, the only means by which men can arrive at true happiness, by which they can attain to the last perfection and dignity of their nature, does not, in the present circumstances of the world, depend on human reasoning or inventions: for, was this the case, we need not to go from home for religion, or to seek farther than our own breast for the means of reconciling ourselves to God, and obtaining his favor, and, in consequence of it, life eternal. On such supposition St. Peter argued very weakly, in saying, 'To whom shall we go?' for to whom need they go to learn that which they were well able to teach themselves?

The second principle referred to is, That the great end of religion is future happiness; and consequently the best religion is that which will most surely direct us to eternal life. On this ground St. Peter prefers the gospel of Christ, 'Thou hast the words of eternal life.'

The third thing is, That the authority and word of God is the only sure foundation of religion, and the only reasonable ground for us to build our hopes on. Thus St. Peter accounts for his confidence in the religion which Christ taught: 'We know, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.'

In this state of the case, the necessity of religion in general is supposed; and the only question is, from what fountain we must derive it? The dispute can only lie between natural and revealed religion: if nature be able to direct us, it will be hard to justify the wisdom of God in giving us a revelation, since the revelation can only serve the same purpose which nature alone could well supply.

Since the light of the gospel has shone throughout the world, nature has been much improving; we see many things clearly, many things which reason readily embraces, which nevertheless

the world before was generally a stranger to. The gospel has given us true notions of God and of ourselves; right conceptions of his holiness and purity, and of the nature of divine worship: it has taught us a religion, in the practice of which our present ease and comfort, and our hopes of future happiness and glory consist; it has rooted out idolatry and superstition, and, by instructing us in the nature of God, and discovering to us his unity, his omnipresence, and infinite knowlege, it has furnished us even with principles of reason, by which we reject and condemn the rites and ceremonies of heathenism and idolatry, and discover wherein the beauty and holiness of divine worship consist: for the nature of divine worship must be deduced from the nature of God; and it is impossible for men to pay a reasonable service to God, till they have just and reasonable notions of him. But now, it seems, this is all become pure natural religion; and it is to our own reason and understanding that we are indebted for the notion of God, and of divine worship; and whatever else in religion is agreeable to our reason, is reckoned to proceed entirely from it: and, had the unbelievers of this age heard St. Peter's piteous complaint, 'Lord, to whom shall we go?' they would have bid him go to himself, and consult his own reason, and there he should find all that was worth finding in religion.

But let us, if you please, examine this pretence, and see on what ground this plea of natural religion can be maintained. If nature can instruct us sufficiently in religion, we have indeed no reason to go any where else; so far we are agreed: but whether nature can or no, is, in truth, rather a question of fact than mere speculation; for the way to know what nature can do, is to take nature by itself and try its strength alone. There was a time when men had little else but nature to go to; and that is the proper time to look into, to see what mere and unassisted nature can do in religion: nay, there are still nations under the sun, who are, as to religion, in a mere state of nature: the glad tidings of the gospel have not reached them, nor have they been blessed, or (to speak in the modern phrase) *prejudiced* with divine revelations, which we, less worthy of them than they, so much complain of: in other matters they are polite and civilized; they are cunning traders, fine artificers, and in many arts and sciences not unskilful. Here, then, we may

hope to see natural religion in its full perfection; for there is no want of natural reason, nor any room to complain of prejudices or prepossession; but yet, alas! these nations are held in the chains of darkness, and given up to the blindest superstition and idolatry. Men wanted not reason before the coming of Christ, nor opportunity nor inclination to improve it: arts and sciences had long before obtained their just perfection; the number of the stars had been counted, and their motions observed and adjusted; the philosophy, oratory, and poetry of those ages are still the delight and entertainment of this. Religion was not the least part of their inquiry; they searched all the recesses of reason and nature; and had it been in the power of reason and nature to furnish men with just notions and principles of religion, here we should have found them; but instead of them we find nothing but the grossest superstition and idolatry; the creatures of the earth advanced into deities; and men degenerating and making themselves lower than the beasts of the field. Time would fail me to tell of the corruptions and extravagances of the politest nations. Their religion was their reproach, and the service they paid their gods was a dishonor to them and to themselves: the most sacred part of their devotion was the most impure; and the only thing commendable in it was, that it was kept as a great mystery and secret, and hid under the darkness of the night; and were reason now to judge, it would approve of nothing in this religion, but the modesty of withdrawing itself from the eyes of the world.

This being the case, wherever men have been left to mere reason and nature to direct them, what security have the great patrons of natural religion now, that, were they left only to reason and nature, they should not run into the same errors and absurdities? Have they more reason than those who have gone before them? In all other instances nature is the same now that ever it was; and we are but acting over again the same part that our ancestors acted before us; wisdom, and prudence, and cunning, are now what they formerly were; nor can this age show human nature in any one character exalted beyond the examples which antiquity has left us. Can we show greater instances of civil and political wisdom than are to be found in the governments of Greece and Rome? Are not the civil laws of

Rome still had in admiration? and have they not a place allowed them still in almost all kingdoms? Since then in nothing else we are grown wiser than the heathen world, what probability is there that we should have grown wiser in religion, if we had been left, as they were, to mere reason and nature? To this day there is no alteration for the better, except only in the countries where the gospel has been preached. What shall we say of the Chinese, a nation that wants not either reason or learning, and in some parts of it pretends to excel the world? They have been daily improving in the arts of life, and in every kind of knowlege and science; but yet in religion they are ignorant and superstitious, and have but very little of what we call natural religion among them: and what ground is there to imagine that reason would have done more, made greater discoveries of truth, or more entirely subdued the passions of men in England, or France, or any other country of Europe, than it has in the eastern or southern parts of the world? Are not men as reasonable creatures in the east as they are in the west? and have not they the same means of exercising and improving their reason too? Why then should you think that reason would do that now in this place, which it has never yet been able to do in any time or place whatever?

This fact is so very plain and undeniable, that I cannot but think, that, would men consider it fairly, they would soon be convinced how much they are indebted to the revelation of the gospel, even for that natural religion which they so fondly boast of: for how comes it to pass, that there is so much reason, such clear natural religion, in every country where the gospel is professed, and so little of both every where else?

But is there then, you will say, no such thing as natural religion? Does not St. Paul lay the heathen world under condemnation for not attending to the dictates of it? 'Because,' says he, 'that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead: so that they are without excuse; because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were

thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.'—A sad account this of the state of religion in the heathen world, and a manifest proof how much nature stands in need of assistance! What we learn from St. Paul is plainly this, that notwithstanding the care which God had taken to display the evidences of his own Being and Godhead in every work of the creation, so that men could not but have a notion of the Deity; yet, so little did they profit by that knowlege, that it served only to render them inexcusable in their superstition and idolatry; for 'when they knew God,' (as indeed all the heathen world had a notion of a supreme Being) yet 'they glorified him not as God; but changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.' And was not nature an excellent guide to follow, that thus stumbled at the very threshold, and, having from natural reason the notion of a supreme Deity, sought to find him among the four-footed beasts and creeping things of the earth? Can you say what it was that thus debased the reason and understanding of mankind? What evil was it that had diffused itself through the whole race, and so possessed their senses, that, 'seeing, they did not perceive, and hearing, they did not understand?' or, do you think that you alone are exempt from this common, this universal blindness; and that the same reason and nature, that hitherto have misguided all the world into error and idolatry, would lead you out of the common road into truth and pure religion?

Is it not the utmost presumption to think thus, and to imagine that we alone are able to surmount the difficulties which all the world before has sunk under? And yet thus every man must think, who sets up natural religion in opposition to revelation: for has mere nature ever yet, in any one part of the world, extricated itself from error? Do the nations of old, or those which now are, afford any instance of this kind? But still you think that nature is sufficient to direct you; and what else

is this but to distinguish yourself from all the world, as if you only were privileged against the common failings and corruptions of mankind.

But you will say, Are there not complete schemes of natural religion drawn from principles and axioms of reason, without calling in the help of revelation? and are they not evident demonstrations that nature is able to furnish us with a religion that is pure and holy, and agreeable to the divine attributes? Allow this: but let us then be informed how it came to pass, that never any system of this pure religion was in use and practice in any nation, or indeed ever fully discovered, till the gospel had enlightened the world. You may boast of Socrates and Plato, and some few others in the heathen world, and tell us perhaps of their great attainments on the strength of mere reason. Be it so: but what is this to the present question? Must millions in every age of the world be left in ignorance, because five or six among them may happen to extricate themselves? Would it be reasonable to suffer a whole nation to perish without help in a plague, because some few were not tainted with the distemper? or, will you say all men are seven feet high, because we see now and then some who are?

I question not but the wise Creator of the world formed us for his own service, and that he gave us whatever was requisite either to the knowlege or the performance of our duty: and that there are still in nature the seeds and principles of religion, however buried under the rubbish of ignorance and superstition, I as little question. But what was it, I beseech you, that oppressed this light of reason and nature for so many ages? and what is it that has now set it free? Whatever the distemper was, nature plainly wanted assistance, being unable to disengage herself from the bonds and fetters in which she was held: we may disagree, perhaps, in finding a name for this evil, this general corruption of nature; but the thing itself is evident; the impotence of nature stands confessed: the blindness, the ignorance of the heathen world are too plain a proof of it. This general corruption and weakness of nature made it necessary that religion should be restored by some other means, and that men should have other helps to resort to, besides their own strength and reason. And, if natural religion is indeed arrived

to that state of perfection so much boasted of, it gives a strong testimony to the gospel, and evidently proves it to be an adequate remedy and support against the evil and corruption of nature. For where the gospel prevails, nature is restored; and reason, delivered from bondage by grace, sees and approves what is holy, just, and pure: for what else can it be ascribed to but the power of the gospel, that, in every nation that names the name of Christ, even reason and nature see and condemn the follies which others still, for want of the same help, are held in subjection to?

Can this truth be evaded or denied? And what a return then do we make for the blessing we have received! and how despitefully do we treat the gospel of Christ, to which we owe that clear light even of reason and nature which we now enjoy, when we endeavor to set up reason and nature in opposition to it! Ought the withered hand, which Christ has restored and made whole, to be lifted up against him? or should the dumb man's tongue, just loosened from the bonds of silence, blaspheme the power that set it free? Yet thus foolishly do we sin, when we make natural religion the engine to batter down the gospel; for the gospel only could and only has restored the religion of nature; and therefore there is a kind of parricide in the attempt, and an infidelity heightened by the aggravating circumstance of unnatural baseness and disingenuity.

Nor will the success of the attempt be much greater than the wisdom and the piety of it: for when once nature leaves her faithful guide, the gospel of Christ, it will be as unable to support itself against error and superstition, as it was to deliver itself from them, and will by degrees fall back into its original blindness and corruption. Had you a view of the disputes that arise even on the principles of natural religion, it would show you what the end will be; for the wanderings of human reason are infinite. Under the gospel dispensation we have the immutable word of God for the support of our faith and hope. We know in whom we have believed; in Him, who can neither deceive, nor be deceived; and, poor as our services are, we have his word for it, that our labor of love shall not be forgotten. But to them who rely on nature only, it is not evident, nor can it be, whether any future reward shall attend their religious

service. Well therefore did St. Peter say to Christ, 'Thou hast the words of eternal life;' for no other religion can give any security of life and happiness to its votaries. Whither then shall we go from Christ, or to whom shall we seek for succor, since he only has the words of eternal life?

DISCOURSE I.

PART II.

THE second thing to be considered is, That the excellency of religion consists in affording certain means of obtaining eternal life.

Religion is founded in the principles of reason and nature; and, without supposing this foundation, it would be as rational an act to preach to horses as to men. A man who has the use of reason cannot consider his condition and circumstances in this world, or reflect on his notions of good and evil, and the sense he feels in himself that he is an accountable creature for the good or evil he does, without asking himself how he came into this world, and for what purpose, and to whom it is that he is, or possibly may be accountable. When, by tracing his own being to the original, he finds that there is one supreme all-wise Cause of all things; when by experience he sees that this world neither is nor can be the place for taking a just and adequate account of the actions of men; the presumption that there is another state after this, in which men shall live, grows strong and almost irresistible; when he considers farther the fears and hopes of nature with respect to futurity, the fear of death common to all, the desire of continuing in being, which never forsakes us; and reflects for what use and purpose these strong impressions were given us by the Author of nature; he cannot help concluding that man was made not merely to act a short part upon the stage of this world, but that there is another and more lasting state, to which he bears relation. And

from hence it must necessarily follow that his religion must be formed on a view of securing a future happiness.

Since, then, the end that men propose to themselves by religion is such, it will teach us wherein the true excellency of religion consists. If eternal life and future happiness are what we aim at, that will be the best religion which will most certainly lead us to eternal life and future happiness: and it will be to no purpose to compare religions together in any other respects, which have no relation to this end.

Let us then by this rule examine the pretensions of revelation, and, as we go along, compare it with the present state of natural religion, that we may be able to judge 'to whom we ought to go.'

Eternal life and happiness are out of our power to give ourselves, or to obtain by any strength and force, or any policy or wisdom. Could our own arm rescue us from the jaws of death, and the powers of the kingdom of darkness; could we set open the gates of heaven for ourselves, and enter in to take possession of life and glory, we should want no instructions or assistances from religion; since what St. Peter said of Christ, every man might apply to himself, and say, 'I have the words, or means, of eternal life.'

But, since we have not this power of life and death, and since there is One who has, who governeth all things in heaven and in earth, who is over all God blessed for evermore, it necessarily follows that either we must have no share or lot in the glories of futurity, or else that we must obtain them from God, and receive them as his gift and favor; and consequently if eternal life be the end of religion, and likewise the gift of God, religion can be nothing else but the means proper to be made use of by us to obtain of God this most excellent and perfect gift of eternal life: for, if eternal life be the end of religion, religion must be the means of obtaining eternal life; and, if eternal life can only be had from the gift of God, religion must be the means of obtaining this gift from God.

And thus far all religions that ever have appeared in the world, have agreed: the question has never yet been made by any, whether God is to be applied to for eternal happiness or no; but every sect has placed its excellency in this, that it

teaches the properest and most effectual way of making this application. Even natural religion pretends to no more than this: it claims not eternal life as the right of nature, but the right of obedience, and of obedience to God, the Lord of nature: and the dispute between natural and revealed religion is not, whether God is to be applied to for eternal happiness; but only, whether nature or revelation can best teach us how to make this application.

Prayers, and praises, and repentance for sins past, are acts of devotion, which nature pretends to instruct and direct us in: but why does she teach us to pray, to praise, or to repent, but that she esteems one to be the proper method of expressing our wants, the other of expressing our gratitude, and the third of making atonement for iniquity and offences against God? In all these acts reference is had to the over-ruling power of the Almighty; and they amount to this confession, that the upshot of all religion is, to please God in order to make ourselves happy.

This will show us what must necessarily be understood by any person's or by any religion's 'having the words of eternal life:' for, since eternal life can only be had by pleasing God, no person, no religion, can be said to have the words of eternal life upon any other account than because it teaches and enables us so far at least to please God as to obtain eternal life from him.

If we consider God as the ruler of this world as well as of the next, religion indeed will be as necessary a means of obtaining the blessings of this life, as of that which is to come. But this will make no alteration in the nature of religion: for if the blessings of this life are the gift of God, they must be obtained by pleasing God; and the same services must entitle us to the blessings of this life and of the next, unless you can suppose that there are different ways of pleasing God; one way to please him, in order to obtain the blessings of this world; and another, in order to obtain the blessings of heaven.

From this account of the nature of religion, that it is the knowlege of pleasing God, and serving him acceptably, (I speak of religion now considered only as a rule,) there are some consequences which naturally follow, that may be of great service to us in directing us in our choice of religion.

First then, Since it is the perfection of religion to instruct us how to please God; and since to please God, and to act according to the will of God, are but one and the same thing; it necessarily follows that must be the most perfect religion which does most perfectly instruct us in the knowlege of the will of God. Allow then nature to have all the advantages that ever the greatest patrons of natural religion laid claim to on her behalf; allow reason to be as clear, as uncorrupted, as unprejudiced, as even our fondest wishes would make it; yet still it can never be supposed that nature and reason, in all their glory, can be able to know the will of God so well as he himself knows it: and therefore, should God ever make a declaration of his will, that declaration must, according to the nature and necessity of the thing, be a more perfect rule for religion than reason and nature can possibly furnish us with. Had we the wisdom and reason of cherubims and seraphims to direct us in the worship and service of our Maker, nevertheless it would be our highest wisdom, as it is theirs, to submit to his laws, that is, to the declarations of his will.

Secondly, From hence it appears, how extremely wrong it is to compare natural religion and revelation together in order to inquire which is preferable; for it is neither more nor less than inquiring whether we know God's will better than he himself knows it. False revelations are no revelations; and therefore to prefer natural religion before such pretended revelations, is only to reject a forgery: but to suppose that there is or may be a true revelation, and yet to say that natural religion is a better guide, is to say that we are wiser than God, and know better how to please him without his directions than with them. On this state of the case then, a revelation must be intirely rejected as a forgery, or intirely submitted to; and the only debate between natural religion and revelation must be, whether we really know a revelation or no; and not whether revelation or nature be, in the nature of things, the best and surest foundation of religion: which dispute but ill becomes our condition, and is a vain attempt to exalt ourselves and our own reason 'above every thing that is called God.'

Since then revelation, considered as such, must needs be the surest guide in religion, every reasonable man is bound to con-

sider the pretensions of revelation, when offered to him; for no man can justify himself in relying merely on natural religion till he has satisfied himself that no better directions are to be had. For, since it is the business of religion to please God, is it not a very natural and a very reasonable inquiry to make, whether God has any where declared what will please him? at least it is reasonable, when we are called to this inquiry by having a revelation tendered to us supported by such evidence, which, though it may be easily rejected without reason, yet to reason will ever approve itself.

But the inquiry into the evidence for any particular revelation is excluded by those who argue against all revelation, *à priori*, as being inconsistent with the wisdom of God. What they say amounts to this, that God, having given us reason, has bound us to obey the dictates of reason, and tied himself down to judge us by that rule, and that only: to suppose otherwise, they imagine, would be to maintain that God gave us an imperfect rule at first, and which wanted to be mended; a thing, they imagine, inconsistent with his wisdom: and the rule of reason being sufficient, all revelation, they judge, must be useless and impertinent, and consequently can never derive itself from God. But as it is too apparent to be denied, that reason and natural religion never did in any age universally prevail; to help out the argument, it is further supposed that whatever happens in the world is agreeable to the original design of God, and consequently, that those who have least of reason and natural religion are in the state for which God designed them; and if so, it is absurd to suppose a revelation should be given, to take men out of that state in which God originally designed to place them.

This is the sum of the argument against revelation *à priori:* to consider it particularly will take more time than can be allowed: but in brief we may observe,

1. That to argue, from the perfection of human reason, that we are discharged from receiving any new laws from God, is inconsistent with as clear a principle of reason as any whatever, and which necessarily arises from the relation between God and man; which is, that the creature is bound to obey the Creator in which way soever his will is made known to him: and this

surely is true with respect to the highest order of beings, as well as to the lowest: for this plea, now made for human reason, would be presumptuous in the mouth of an angel, and inconsistent with the subjection he owes to God.

2. As to the perfection of human reason, it cannot be, nor, I suppose, will it be maintained, that human reason is absolutely perfect; and therefore the meaning must be, that reason is relatively perfect, considered as the rule of our obedience. But this is true only on the supposition that reason is the only rule of our obedience; for, if there be any other rule besides, mere reason cannot be the perfect rule of our obedience: and therefore this argument is really begging the thing in question; for it supposes there is no other rule but reason, which is the thing not to be supposed, but to be proved. As much may be said for every law as is said in this case for human reason: every law, being the only law in the case, is a perfect rule for the subject's obedience, because the subject is bound to no more than the law requires: but if the law be amended and enlarged by the same authority that made it, it is no longer a perfect rule of obedience; but, to make it such, it must be taken jointly with the corrections and enlargements made by the proper authority.

3. Hence it follows that to alter or add to a law once considered as a perfect rule of obedience, when an alteration of circumstances requires it, is neither useless nor impertinent, but oftentimes the effect of wisdom and necessity.

4. To say that revelation is unnecessary because reason is a perfect rule, and at the same time to affirm that those who have but an imperfect use of reason have need of revelation, is a manifest contradiction: to say farther, that those who are in such a state that actually they do not obey the laws of reason, and, morally speaking, cannot obey, are nevertheless in such a state as God intended they should be in, is not only making God the author of evil, but it is ascribing to him two inconsistent intentions: for to argue that God gave men reason to be the rule of their obedience, is supposing that his original intention is, that men should obey reason; to argue at the same time that those who live in disobedience to this law are in the state which God intended them to be in, is to suppose that God in-

tended the law should be obeyed, and not obeyed at the same time. But to return:

We are not now arguing in behalf of any particular revelation, which may be true or false for any thing that has hitherto been said: but this I urge, that revelation is the surest foundation of religion; and this wants no other proof than an explication of the terms: religion, considered as a rule, is the knowlege of serving and pleasing God: revelation is the declaration of God, how he would be served, and what will please him: and, unless we know what will please God better than he himself does, revelation must be the best rule to serve and please God by; that is, it must be the best religion.

From hence then, I say, it is incumbent on every man of sense and reason, on every one who judges for himself in the choice of his religion, first to inquire whether there be a revelation or no: nor can the precepts of natural religion singly be drawn into question, till it is first certain that there is no revelation to direct us: and therefore there can be no comparison stated generally between natural and revealed religion, in order to determine our choice between them; because the revelation must be first rejected before natural religion can pretend to the sole direction.

And yet this is the beaten path that unbelievers tread: they consider in general that revelation is subject to many uncertainties; it may be a cheat at first, or it may be corrupted afterwards, and not faithfully handed down to them; but in natural religion there can be no cheat, because in that every man judges for himself, and is bound to nothing but what is agreeable to the dictates of reason and his own mind: and on these general views they reject all revelations whatever, and adhere to natural religion as the safer guide. But attend to the consequence of this reasoning, which is this; that, because there may be a false revelation, therefore there cannot be a true one: for, unless this consequence be just, they are inexcusable in rejecting all revelations, because of the uncertainties which may attend them.

But now to apply what has been said to the Christian revelation: it has such pretences, at least, as may make it worthy of a particular consideration: it pretends to come from heaven; to

have been delivered by the Son of God; to have been confirmed by undeniable miracles and prophecies; to have been ratified by the blood of Christ and his Apostles, who died in asserting its truth. It can show likewise an innumerable company of martyrs and confessors: its doctrines are pure and holy, its precepts just and righteous; its worship is a reasonable service, refined from the errors of idolatry and superstition, and spiritual like the God who is the object of it: it offers the aid and assistance of heaven to the weakness of nature; which makes the religion of the gospel to be as practicable as it is reasonable: it promises infinite rewards to obedience, and threatens eternal punishment to obstinate offenders; which makes it of the utmost consequence to us soberly to consider it, since every one who rejects it stakes his own soul against the truth of it.

Are these such pretences as are to be turned off with general and loose objections? Because miracles may be pretended, shall not the miracles of Christ be considered, which were not so much as questioned by the adversaries of the gospel in the first ages? Because there may be impostors, shall Christ be rejected, whose life was innocence, and free from any suspicion of private design, and who died to seal the truths he had delivered? Because there have been cheats introduced by worldly men, endeavoring to make a gain of godliness, shall the gospel be suspected, that in every page declares against the world, against the pleasures, the riches, the glories of it; that labors no one thing more than to draw off the affections from things below, and to raise them to the enjoyment of heavenly and spiritual delights?

But whether you will consider it or no, yet there is such a call to you to consider it, as must render your neglect inexcusable. You cannot say you want inducement to consider it, when you see it entertained by men of all degrees. The gospel does not make so mean a figure in the world as to justify your contempt of it: the light shines forth in the world, whether you will receive it or no; if you receive it not, the consequence is upon your own soul, and you must answer it.

Were men sincere in their professions of religion, or even in their desires of salvation and immortality, the controversies in religion would soon take a new turn: the only question would

be, whether the gospel were true or no? We should have no reasoning against revelation in general; for it is impossible that a sincerely religious man should not wish for a revelation of God's will, if there be not one already: we should then see another kind of industry used in searching the truths of God, which are now overlooked, because men have lost their regard for the things which make for their salvation. Were the gospel but a title to an estate, there is not an infidel of them all who would sit down contented with his own general reasonings against it: it would then be thought worth looking into; its proofs would be considered, and a just weight allowed them: and yet the gospel is our title, our only title, to a much nobler inheritance than this world knows; it is the parent by which we claim life and immortality, and all the joys and blessings of the heavenly Canaan. Had any man but a pedigree as ancient as the gospel, what a noise should we have about it! and yet the gospel is despised, which sets forth to us a nobler pedigree than the kings of the earth can boast; a descent from Christ, who is head over the whole family; by which we claim as heirs of God, and coheirs with Christ: and, did we not despise our relation with Christ, and secretly abhor and dread the thoughts of immortality, we could not be so cold in our regard to the gospel of God.

I wish every man who argues against the Christian religion, would take this one serious thought along with him; that he must one day, if he believes that God will judge the world, argue the case once more at the judgment-seat of God: and let him try his reasons accordingly. Do you reject the gospel because you will admit nothing that pretends to be a revelation? Consider well; is it a reason that you will justify to the face of God? Will you tell him that you had resolved to receive no positive commands from him, nor to admit any of his declarations for law? If it will not be a good reason then, it is not a good reason now; and the stoutest heart will tremble to give such an impious reason to the Almighty, which is a plain defiance to his wisdom and authority.

DISCOURSE I.

PART III.

A FAIRER issue there cannot be for the trial of any religion: for, since eternal life is the end that all men aim at by religion, that must necessarily be the best religion, which most certainly leads us to this great and desirable blessing. But the difficulty is, how to apply this rule so as to form our judgments upon it, and direct our choice, since all religions pretend 'to have the words of eternal life;' which makes it necessary for us first to enable ourselves to determine which are, and which are not, 'words of eternal life,' before this rule can be of any service to us in distinguishing true and genuine religion from the specious pretences of counterfeits and impostors. In order to this, we must consider that there are some principles which in all religions are allowed, and from the consideration of which we may possibly come to some fixed determination in this matter: such are these; that life eternal can be had only from God, who is the author and fountain of all being: that from him the only way to obtain it is, by living and conversing in this world agreeably to his holy will: from whence it evidently follows, that, since to do the will of God is the only way of obtaining eternal life, the words which instruct us in the knowlege of God's will must needs be 'the words of eternal life.' Thus far we can go on mere principles of reason.

From hence the way lies open and plain to another consequence of some importance in the present question: for, since it is the perfection of religion, considered as a rule or institution, to direct us in all things to act according to the will of God, when we inquire from what principle we ought to derive our religion, we do in truth inquire from what principle we may best derive the knowlege of God's will; for the knowlege of God's will is universally acknowleged to be the true and proper rule and measure of our religious obedience in all things.

There are but two ways by which we can possibly arrive at this knowlege: one is, by following the dictates of reason and nature; when from that knowlege of God and his attributes, which reason and nature furnish us with, we infer his right of governing, and our duty of obeying; and when from the holiness and purity of God, and the necessary difference between good and evil, we infer wherein our obedience must consist, namely, in serving a holy God in holy things, and in keeping ourselves pure and undefiled from evil, even as he is pure: and this is called natural religion. The other way by which we may possibly arrive at the knowlege of God's will, is, by having it declared to us, either immediately by God himself, or by others sufficiently authorized and commissioned by him to make such declaration in his name: and this is what we call revelation. And, as nature and revelation are the only ways by which we can come to the understanding of God's will; so, for that reason they are the only principles from which religion can derive itself.

Between these two, considered purely as principles of religious knowlege, it is no hard matter to judge which is the safest and securest for us to rely on; it being a matter that will bear no dispute, whether our own reason or God himself can best instruct us in the knowlege of his will; upon which single point the whole controversy between nature and revelation turns, as long as they are considered only as principles of religion, without drawing into the question the merits of any particular revelation, or of any particular scheme or system of natural religion: the consequence of which is plainly this; that as nature is a better guide than any pretended revelation, so every true revelation, as far as it goes, is a better guide than nature.

The last consequence, and for the sake of which I have made this deduction hitherto, is, that when any particular revelation is to be examined, when it lies before us to be received or to be rejected, it is absurd, in the very nature of the thing, to put the determination upon a comparison between natural religion and revelation, considered in themselves; since, if the revelation be false, there want no arguments to make it yield to nature; and, if it be true, no arguments can be sufficient.

And thus it appears that the very topic itself is excluded, from which the deists of the present age fetch their main support, and all the plausible arguments by which they labor to explode the gospel, and to render it useless and insignificant, and consequently vile and contemptible in the opinion of the world.

On the same principle we may proceed to examine other general objections made use of in opposition to the revelation of Christ Jesus. The gospel is a dispensation of Providence in regard to mankind, which the reason of man cannot fathom, nor his utmost sagacity search into; which the angels themselves 'desire to look into,' and, after all their inquiries, are content to reverence and adore at an awful distance. These methods of salvation are matter of great complaint with unbelievers: they think it highly unreasonable that God should propose such things as objects of faith; and from the unreasonableness of the imposition they argue (which presupposed, they conclude not much amiss) that these terms of salvation were not of God's contrivance, but are owing to the guile and deceit of cunning impostors, who took pleasure in abusing mankind.

Though this objection is levelled against the Christian revelation particularly, yet it must conclude equally against revelation in general, considered as a principle of religion, if it makes any addition to the things to be done or believed beyond what reason teaches us. The question then will be, whether it can be reasonable for God to propose any articles of faith, or any conditions of salvation, the reason and propriety of which does not appear to man? and this is a question of great importance, it being confessedly the case of the gospel.

In the sense of the gospel, whatever is the effect of God's secret counsels, in order to the redemption of the world, is a mystery. That men ought to obey God in truth and holiness, that they may obtain his blessing—that sinners ought to be punished—are not, nor ever were mysteries; because these things were sufficiently published to the world when men were endued with reason. But all the methods of religion beyond these were, and still are, mysterious: the intention of God to redeem the world from sin by sending his own Son in the likeness of man, is a mystery unknown to former ages; it is a mys-

tery still, inasmuch as we cannot penetrate into the depths of this divine economy, or account, by the principles of human reason, for every step or article of it. But let it be remembered that not human reason, but the will of God, is the rule and measure of religious obedience: and, if so, the terms of religious obedience must be tried by their agreeableness to the will of God, and not measured by the narrow compass of man's reason. If reason can discover, either by internal or external signs, the conditions of salvation proposed to us to be the will of God, the work of reason is over, and we are obliged to use the means, which are prescribed by God, as we hope to obtain the end, which is the gift of God: and how little soever reason can penetrate into the mysteries of God, yet, if it can discover them to be indeed the mysteries of God, and by him proposed to us as necessary to salvation, it discovers plainly to us that these mysteries of God are 'the words of eternal life;' which is all, I think, that a reasonable man would desire to find in his religion; for, since all that he desires to obtain by his religion is eternal life, what more has he to look for in his religion than 'the words' or means 'of eternal life?'

This is true, you will say, on supposition of God's requiring the belief of mysteries, or the practice of any positive duties from us; then it will be our duty to hearken to his voice, and entirely submit our wills and understandings to him: but how does this prove it reasonable for him so to do, or remove the prejudice that lies against the gospel, because of its mysterious doctrines?

To come then to the point: it will, I suppose, be easily granted to be agreeable to the wisdom and goodness of God to reveal whatever is necessary to be revealed in order to perfect the salvation of mankind; as, on the other side, it must be allowed that it is not consistent with infinite wisdom and goodness to reveal mysteries merely to puzzle the minds of men. These allowances being made on each side, the question is reduced to this; whether it can be ever necessary to reveal mysteries in order to perfect the salvation of mankind? Whenever it is necessary, it must be reasonable, unless it be unreasonable for God to save the world; and on this foot it will be found that a revelation cannot have 'the words of eternal life' without

opening to us all necessary truths, how abstruse and mysterious soever some of them may be.

With respect to infinite wisdom, there is no such thing as mystery in nature: all things are equally clear in the understanding of the Deity; all things lie naked before his eye, having no darkness, obscurity, or difficulty in them. A mystery therefore is no real or positive thing in nature; nor is it any thing that is inherent or belonging to the subjects of which it is predicated. When we say this thing or that thing is a mystery, according to the form of our speech, we seem to affirm something of this or that thing; but, in truth, the proposition is not affirmative with respect to the thing, but negative with respect to ourselves: for, when we say this thing is a mystery, of the thing we say nothing, but of ourselves we say, that we do not comprehend this thing. With respect to our understanding, there is no more difference between truth that is, and truth that is not mysterious, than, with respect to our strength, there is between a weight which we can lift, and a weight which we cannot lift: for, as defect of strength in us makes some weights to be immoveable, so likewise defect of understanding makes some truths to be mysterious.

The complaint then against mysteries in religion amounts to no more than this; that God has done something for us, or appointed something for us to do, in order to save us, the reason of which we do not understand; and requires us to believe and to comply with these things, and to trust him that we shall receive the benefit of them: for this is all the faith, or positive obedience, that is required of us; as will in its due place appear.

But to return to the question, whether it can be ever necessary for God to reveal mysteries, or appoint positive duties, in order to perfect the salvation of mankind; or, in other words, to use such means for the salvation of the world, the agreeableness of which to the end intended the reason of man cannot discover? This is certain, that, whenever it is out of our power by natural means to save ourselves, if we are to be saved at all, it is necessary that supernatural means be made use of: and, how hard soever it may be to conceive this to be the case of mankind in general; yet of particular men it will not, I pre-

sume, be denied but that they may sin so far, and render themselves so obnoxious to the justice of God, that it shall not be in the power of mere reason and nature to find an infallible method of atoning the justice of God, and, consequently, redeeming the sinner from death: and in this case there is a plain necessity that the sinner must perish, or be redeemed by such means as reason and nature are strangers to; since, in the means that reason and nature can prescribe, there is confessedly no help for him.

What may confessedly happen to one man, or to many, may possibly happen to all: suppose then (since there is no absurdity in the supposition) that all men have so far sinned as to have lost the rights and pleas of obedient subjects; that an universal corruption has spread through the whole race, and rendered them incapable of performing the duties of reason and nature, or, if they could perform them, precluded the merit and title of all such works to reward; for the works of nature, though they may prevent a forfeiture, yet they cannot reverse a forfeiture once incurred: in this case what shall be done? Is it unreasonable for God to redeem the world? God forbid! and yet by the means of reason and nature the world cannot be redeemed. Will you allow that God may freely forgive the sins of the world, and remit the punishment, and bestow even on sinners the gift of eternal life? How mysterious would even this grace be, and how far beyond the power of reason to comprehend! Could you, from any of the natural notions of your mind, reconcile this method of redemption with the wisdom, justice, and holiness of God? Consider the essential difference between good and evil, the natural beauty of one, and the natural deformity of the other; compare them with the essential holiness of the Deity; and then tell me the ground upon which he reconciles himself to sin, pities and forgives it, and decrees immortal glory for the sinner: or, if this way please you not, consider his wisdom, by which he rules and governs the world, and try, by all the notions you can frame of wisdom, whether it be not necessary for the good government of the rational world, that rewards and punishments should be divided with an equal hand to virtue and vice; and then tell me where is the wisdom of dropping all the punishment due to sin,

and receiving sinners not only to pardon but to glory? There may be wisdom and holiness in this, but not human wisdom, nor holiness that human reason can discern; but infinite mysterious wisdom and holiness. If from the notions of wisdom and holiness you can have no help in this case, much less will the natural notion of justice assist you. Is not justice conversant in rewards and punishments? Is it not the essence of justice to distribute both where they are due? Is there not in nature and reason a connexion between virtue and reward, between vice and punishment? How then comes nature to be reversed, and the laws of reason to be disturbed? and how, as if justice were more than poetically blind, come sinners to be entitled to life and happiness? Even in this case therefore, of God's finally forgiving the sins of the world, which is the lowest that can be put, religion would necessarily be mysterious, and not to be apprehended by reason or nature, but to be received by faith; and our only refuge would be, not in the reason and nature of the thing, but in the unfathomable goodness and incomprehensible mercy of God.

But, should it really be, as to human reason it appears, inconsistent with the wisdom and justice of God so freely to pardon sin, as not to leave the marks of his displeasure upon it, or to remit the transgressions of men, without vindicating in the face of the whole creation the honor of his laws and government; in what amaze must reason then be lost, in searching after the means of reconcilement and redemption! How shall sin be punished, and yet the sinner saved? How shall the honor of God's government be vindicated in the face of all the world, and yet in the face of all the world the rebels justified and exalted? These are difficulties irreconcileable to human reason and nature; and yet they must be reconciled, or the world, once lost, must lie for ever under condemnation. The religion that can adjust this difficulty, and give us the clue to lead us through these mazes, in which human reason must for ever wander, can only have 'the words of eternal life;' which 'words of eternal life' must necessarily abound with inconceivable mysteries, but with mysteries of grace and mercy.

So far is it from being an objection against the gospel of Christ, that it contains many wonderful mysteries of the hidden

wisdom of God, that, as our case stands, without a mystery it is impossible for us to be saved: for, since reason and nature cannot find the means of rescuing sinners from punishment, and of making atonement to the justice of God; since they cannot prescribe a proper satisfaction for sin, in which the honor of God and the salvation of men shall be at once consulted; since they cannot remedy the corruption that has spread through the race of mankind, or infuse new principles of virtue and holiness into the souls already subdued to the lust and power of sin; since, if they could procure our pardon for what is past, they cannot secure us for the future from the same temptations, which by fatal experience we know we cannot withstand: since, I say, these things cannot be done by the means of reason and nature, they must be done by such means as reason and nature know nothing of; that is, in other words, they must be done by mysterious means, of the propriety of which we can have no adequate notion or conception.

If you stand in need of no new favor, if you aim not so high as eternal life, religion without mysteries may well serve your turn. The principles of natural religion tend to procure the peace and tranquillity of this life; and the not distinguishing between religion as a rule of life for our present use and well-being here, and as the means of obtaining pardon for sin and eternal life hereafter, may have in some measure occasioned the great complaint against the mysteries of the gospel: for mysteries are not indeed the necessary parts of religion, considered only as a rule of action; but most necessary they are to it, when considered as a means of obtaining pardon and eternal glory. And this farther shows how unreasonably men object against the mysterious wisdom of the gospel, since all that the gospel prescribes to us as our duty is plain and evident; all that is mysterious is on God's part, and relates entirely to the surprising acts of divine wisdom and mercy in the redemption of the world. Consider the gospel then as a rule of action, no religion was ever so plain, so calculated upon the principles of reason and nature; so that natural religion itself had never more natural religion in it. If we consider the end proposed to us, and the means used to entitle us to the benefit of it, it grows mysterious, and soars above the reach of human reason; for

God has done more for us than reason could teach us to expect, or can now teach us to comprehend. Let us then do our part, which we plainly understand, and let us trust in God that he will do his; though it exceeds the strength of human wisdom to comprehend the length, and depth, and breadth of that wisdom and mercy, which God has manifested to the world through his Son Christ Jesus, our Lord.

DISCOURSE I.

PART IV.

As, with respect to the health of the body, there is one regimen proper to preserve and maintain a sound constitution, and another to assist and restore a broken and distempered one; the one case requiring little more than wholesome food and temperance, the other calling for all that the help and skill of the physician can furnish: so it is in religion. An innocent man has nothing more to do than to preserve his innocence, which is his title to the favor of God; and therefore his religion is only a rule of life, directing him in all things how to preserve his integrity, and walk uprightly with his God. This is the first and the natural notion of religion; because the first and natural state of mankind was a state of innocence, and required no other religion than this. Here, indeed, there is no room for any thing mysterious, this religion being founded merely in the natural notions of justice and equity, and the necessary difference between good and evil: nor is it at all to be wondered at, that, whilst men consider religion under this single view, and imagine that whatever is to be done for their salvation is to be done by themselves, and that religion is only the rule directing them how to do it, they should see no use of mysteries, nor, consequently, any reason to admit them.

But, on supposition of men's becoming sinners, and liable to the displeasure and wrath of God, religion itself becomes a new

thing. Innocence, which once was all the care religion had, is now vanished, and with it all our hopes of glory and immortality. The natural attributes of God, which to the eyes of innocence afforded a pleasant prospect, to the eyes of sinners are exceeding dreadful. What then shall the sinner do? Shall he seek to natural religion in this distress? But, if this religion be nothing but a rule of living well, what is that to him, who has already lived so ill as to be obnoxious to condemnation? As well may you send the condemned malefactor to study the law by which he dies, in order to save his life, as the sinner to the perfect rule of life, which he has transgressed, in order to save his soul. The more he studies the rule by which he should have lived, and compares it with his own transgressions, he will but the more fully comprehend how much he deserves punishment, and how desperate the state is to which his sin has reduced him. In a religion, which is barely a rule of life, there is no sure comfort or support to be had against the terrors of guilt and sin.

Unbelievers may think we ask too much of them to be granted, when we argue on this supposition, 'that all are sinners, and are fallen short of the glory of God.' But as this is the supposition upon which the gospel uniformly proceeds, pretending to no more than to provide means of salvation for sinners, whoever takes on himself to question the reasonableness of the gospel, must consider it as being what it pretends to be; otherwise he will not argue against the gospel, but against something else formed in his own imagination. If, on examination of the gospel, it appears to be indeed, what it pretends to be, a means for saving sinners, you must necessarily come to one or other of the following resolutions: if you are conscious to yourself that you are a sinner, you must gladly receive the remedy provided for you, and which on examination you find to be proper for your case; or, if you are satisfied with yourself, and want no help, you must reject it as unnecessary and improper in your case, and trust intirely to your own merit; and must appear before God, and demand life and immortality as due from his justice and equity, which you will not accept as a gift from his grace and mercy.

Let us then consider what is necessary to be done for a sin-

ner in order to restore him to eternal life; and that will teach us the true notion of that religion mentioned in the text, and which are 'the words of eternal life;' and will enable us to judge what weight there is in the objection raised against such a religion from the additions which it makes to natural religion.

First then, It is necessary, in order to restore a sinner to eternal life, that God be reconciled to him:

Secondly, That the sinner be purged from the impurity contracted by sin:

Thirdly, That for the future he be enabled to obey the holy laws of God, without which his reconcilement to God would be fruitless and of no effect.

I think there needs but little to be said to prove the necessity of these conditions: if the sinner's case be desperate because God is provoked by his iniquity, and justly angry at his offences, there can be no foundation for him to hope till God be reconciled to him: if sinners are impure and odious in the sight of God because of their sins, their impurity must be cleansed before he can again take pleasure in them, and delight to do them good: if the transgression of the laws of reason and nature, which are the laws of God, was that which lost him the favor of God; that he may not lose it again, after being reconciled to him, it is necessary that he sin no more, or if he does, that a remedy be provided to restore him.

Allowing then these conditions to be necessary to the salvation of a sinner, and likewise that religion must contain 'the words' or means 'of eternal life;' it necessarily follows that the sinner's religion must contain the means by which he may be reconciled to God; the means by which he may be purified and cleansed from sin; and the means by which he may be enabled for the future to obey the will of God: for these are the necessary means by which a sinner must be saved; and therefore they must necessarily be contained in the sinner's religion. How imperfect a notion then have we of such a religion, when we consider it only as a rule of action! and how weakly must we argue against it when our arguments are pointed only against this notion or idea of it!

A rule of action must be plain and intelligible, or else it is

no rule; for we can neither obey nor disobey a law that we cannot understand: and therefore from this idea of religion, that it is a rule of action, there lies a very plain objection against admitting mysteries in religion: and let the objection have its full force, the gospel is secure from the blow; for the rule of life contained in the gospel is the plainest, as well as the purest, that ever the world was acquainted with. In the precepts of Christianity there is no mystery, no shadow of a mystery, to be seen; they are all simple, and to men of the lowest understandings intelligible; the duties which it requires us to perform to God, to ourselves, and to our neighbors, are such as, when offered to us, we cannot but in our minds and consciences approve: and therefore the gospel, as far as it is a rule of life, is far from being mysterious, since both the sense and the reason of the law are open and plain, and such as we cannot but see, and, when we see, consent to.

But since this is not the only notion or idea of religion, that it is a rule of life; let us consider whether, according to the other ideas which belong to it, it be equally absurd to suppose it in some points mysterious. Let us examine it then under this notion, as containing the means by which God is reconciled to sinners.

And first, it is obvious to observe that here is not the same reason against mysteries as in the other case: for, though we cannot practise a law without understanding it, yet God may be reconciled to us, and we have the assurance of it without our being able to comprehend and account for every thing that was done in order to it. A malefactor may receive a pardon, and enjoy the benefit of it, without knowing what it was that induced his prince to grant it; and would, without doubt, be thought mad to stand out against the mercy, merely because he could not dive into the secret reasons of it. Could not a sinner receive the benefit of God's mercy without understanding all the methods of it, it would then be necessary indeed, that even this part of religion should be free from mysteries, and made plain to every man's understanding: but since a sinner may be saved by a mercy which he cannot comprehend, where is the absurdity of offering sinners mercy, and requiring them to rely on it, or, in other words, to believe in it,

though it be never so incomprehensible or mysterious? Were it unreasonable or impossible to believe things to be, without knowing how they came to be, faith could never be reasonable in religion, or in any thing else: but since the knowlege of the essence of things, and of the existence of things, are two distinct kinds of knowlege, and independent of one another, our ignorance of the essence of things, and of the relation they have to each other, can never be a good argument against the belief of their existence: and yet this objection contains all the argument that unbelievers bring against the mysteries of Christianity. Why do they, for instance, refuse to believe Christ to be the Son of God? only because they cannot comprehend how he can be the eternal Son of God: and if they will be true to their principle, and carry the objection as far as it will go, they must in time come to deny the existence of every thing in the world, themselves not excepted. Since then to comprehend the reason and nature of things is neither necessary to our believing the reality of them, nor yet to our receiving benefit and advantage from them, how comes it to be necessary that in religion there should be nothing that we do not understand? Necessary it cannot be to our salvation, for we may be saved by means we comprehend not; nor yet to our faith is it necessary, for we may, and do daily believe the reality of things without knowing any thing of the nature and reasons of them. And, if mysteries may set forward our salvation, and are not destructive of our faith, on what other views they can be excluded from religion I cannot conceive.

Thus much then may serve to show that according to this notion of religion, that it contains the means by which God is reconciled to sinners, no argument can be drawn to weaken the authority of any religion, because some parts of it are mysterious: but if you consider it farther, it will appear that this part of religion must necessarily be mysterious, and the means of reconcilement such as reason and nature cannot comprehend. This I partly observed to you in a former part of this discourse, and shall therefore the more briefly touch it now.

The principles from which this consequence I think will follow, are these: that men are sinners: that God must be re-

conciled to sinners in order to their salvation: that religion must contain 'the words of eternal life,' or the certain method by which we may obtain eternal life. The consequence of these principles is evident, that religion must contain the means by which God is reconciled to sinners; for since this reconcilement is necessary to eternal life, religion cannot have 'the words of eternal life' without it. Now then, if there be no such means of reconcilement, which reason and nature can either discover or comprehend, this part of religion must necessarily be mysterious; since what reason cannot comprehend is mysterious. Now, from the natural notion we have of God and his attributes, there arises such a difficulty in this case as reason cannot get over: for it is certain, according to all the natural notions of our mind, that it is just for God to punish sinners: it is likewise certain that God can do nothing but what is just: if therefore he forgives sinners, and receives them to mercy, and remits their punishment, it is then certain that it is just for God in this circumstance not to punish sinners. Now, reason cannot comprehend how it should, with respect to the same individual sinners, be just to punish, and just not to punish them. If it be not just to punish sinners, there wants no reconcilement for sinners; and if it be not just not to punish them, no reconcilement can be had, for it is contrary to the nature of God to do what is not just. The same argument lies from all the attributes of the Deity, which are at all concerned in the redemption of mankind: his wisdom and holiness, and even his mercy, are as indiscernible as his justice. Now try how far reason can go towards discovering the means of reconcilement: lay down first these certain and allowed principles—that it is just for God to punish sinners—that God can do nothing but what is just—and try how you can come at the other conclusion, which must be the foundation of a sinner's reconcilement to God; namely, that it is just for God not to punish sinners, and righteous in him to receive them to favor. If reason cannot discover or comprehend how both these propositions should be true at the same time with respect to the same persons, it is impossible that it should discover or comprehend the means which God makes use of to reconcile himself to sinners; that is, it is impossible for God to make use of

any means that are not mysterious, that is, above the reach and comprehension of human wisdom.

This difficulty must for ever remain as long as we attempt to scan the divine justice by our narrow conceptions of it; and this is the very difficulty that makes many things in the gospel to be mysterious. The scripture tells us 'that God has been reconciled to sinners by the death of Christ—that he made atonement for the sins of the whole world.' These are great mysteries: we cannot see that there is any proportion between the sufferings of one and the sins of all; or, if there were, we cannot see the justice of laying the sins of the wicked on the innocent head. If we could see the reasons on which the justice of God proceeds in this case, here would be no mystery; and therefore the mysteriousness of the whole proceeding arises only from hence, that our finite minds cannot comprehend the reasons and limits of the divine justice. Most certain it is, that, if God be reconciled to sinners, satisfaction must be made to his justice; for he may as well cease to be God as to be just. Whatever satisfaction is made, it must be founded in the reasons of his own justice, that is, of justice directed by infinite wisdom. The reasons of such justice we cannot comprehend; and therefore we must either be saved by means that are mysterious to us, or God must give us infinite wisdom to comprehend the reason of his justice. You see then that from this notion of religion, considered as containing the means by which God reconciled himself to the world, it is so far from being absurd to suppose it in some parts mysterious, that it is not possible it should be otherwise.

To redeem the world is the work of God: he only could find the means of reconciliation, and he only could apply them: it is our part merely to accept them, and to obey the terms and conditions on which he offers them. Religion therefore, which is founded on redemption, must needs consist of these two parts; an account of the redemption wrought by God, and instructions to men on what terms they may reap the benefit of the redemption. As far as our part goes in the gospel, there is nothing mysterious; we have nothing to do for ourselves, but what we very well know how to do. As to the other parts of the gospel, we are not required to comprehend

and account for God's method of salvation, but only to accept them; which, as I before observed, are two distinct acts of the mind, and not dependent on each other. As for the work of God in our redemption, it is indeed wonderful and mysterious; and why should it seem strange to you that it is so? Are there any other works of God which are not mysterious? Consider the creation and formation of this world; consider the sun, the moon, and the stars, the works of his hand; tell me by what secret power they move, by what rule their different motions were at first impressed, and by what secret in nature or providence ever since preserved. Or, if you think it hard to be sent to consider the heavens at a distance, do but consider the earth, and the meanest creatures of it: can you tell how they are formed? how they 'live, and move, and have their being?' Nay, can you name that work of God which is not mysterious? Is there any thing in nature, the first principles of which you can discover and see into? If in all the works of God there is no such thing, why should we think it strange that in his work of redemption he has appeared so like himself, and that in this as in every thing else 'his ways are past finding out?' We live by the preservation of providence, and enjoy the comforts and pleasures of this life; and yet how mysterious is our preservation! how little do we know of the methods by which we are preserved! and yet the benefits of it we enjoy, notwithstanding our ignorance of the means: and why is it a greater absurdity to suppose that men may be redeemed, without comprehending all the means made use of in their redemption? In all other instances whatever, the miraculousness of an escape adds to the pleasure and joy of it, and is always remembered with a kind of ecstacy in the relation. Salvation is the only instance in which men demur on the means, and are unwilling to receive the mercy, because they cannot understand the methods of obtaining it. In any other case a man would be thought beside himself, who should act in the same manner.

As to the other two points, the cleansing sinners from their iniquity, and enabling them to live virtuously for the future; or, in other words, the sanctification and grace promised in the gospel; I shall not enter into the consideration of them parti-

cularly, because the same way of reasoning is applicable in these cases, *mutatis mutandis;* and therefore I shall leave them to your own reflection.

On the whole, the only true and fair way of judging of the gospel is, to consider what is the true state of mankind in the world. If men are in a state of purity and innocence, no redemption is wanting, and the methods prescribed in the gospel bear no relation to their circumstances: but if men have every where sinned, and come short of the glory of God, the law of nature cannot help them to those blessings which by the law of nature are forfeited; and there is manifestly a necessity to have recourse to other means to obtain salvation.

It may be said, for it often is said, that, whatever degree of light men have, it will make little difference in the case; since an equitable judge will consider men and their merits in proportion to their abilities. Allowing this maxim to be true, yet it plainly goes no farther than this, that God will not punish men for not doing the things which their natural powers enabled them not to do. The argument cannot go farther: you cannot argue from the weakness or stupidity of men, that they shall be rewarded. It may be a good reason not to beat a man when he does amiss, because he is a fool, and knows not what he does; but it is no reason to honor or to advance him. And therefore a religion founded in this favorite principle cannot be said 'to have the words of eternal life;' for no plea, no claim for eternal life can possibly be raised out of it.

Considering, therefore, religion under the character given in the text, 'that it has the words of eternal life,' we shall have reason to conclude with St. Peter, that our only hope is in God, and in him whom he hath sent, our blessed Lord and Redeemer; and with him to say, 'Lord, whither shall we go? thou, thou only hast the words of eternal life. And we believe, and are sure, that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE II.

HEBREWS, CHAP. VII.—VERSE 25.

WHEN we consider the wonderful work of our redemption, we cannot imagine it to be the effect of mere will and arbitrary appointment, not founded in the reason and propriety of things: from our natural notions of God and his attributes, it is absurd to suppose that he could do any thing by chance, or from mere will and humor: this as true in works of grace as in those of nature: it is one thing, not to be able to discern the reasons of Providence, and another to suppose them void of reason: no religion can subsist with an opinion of this latter kind. The gospel has made an alteration in the scheme of religion by revealing the Son of God: the knowlege of his power in the creating and upholding all things became necessary for the foundation of our faith in him as the Redeemer; for that character would be ill supported by one who had not power equal to the undertaking: the doctrines therefore of the New Testament relate to that character, of which there was no explicit declaration, either before or under the Law of Moses. Natural religion leads us to acknowlege one supreme intelligent Creator of all things; and therefore all the religious duties of man in that state relate to this Being alone: but suppose it could discover that this Being had an eternal Son, *by whom he made the worlds;* would there not on that supposition necessarily arise an alteration in natural religion? It cannot be supposed that we were created by the Son, are under his government, and shall be under his judgment, and at the same time be maintained that no service is due to him from his creatures and

subjects: the conclusion therefore is, that the religion of a Christian is a natural and reasonable service. When we consider what expectations we have from our Redeemer, and what are his promises to us, it is but reasonable to ask, by what authority he does these things? The foundation of our expectations is shown to be reasonable from Scriptural authorities; and we have thence reason to conclude that he is now as able to restore life, as he was at first to give it. The relation of Christ to mankind as Creator and Governor considered: the work of redemption could not properly have been undertaken by any other hand: this shown to be the case both from reason and from Scripture. Though the redemption of mankind be a work which seems to concern men only, yet considered as a vindication of God's justice and goodness, it is exposed to the consideration of every intelligent being in the universe: hence, though it relates immediately to men, it must be agreeable to all the reason and relation of things discoverable by the highest intellectual beings; and there are many such not discoverable by us. The existence of orders superior to man agrees both with reason and with Scripture; and since God's justice and equity in redemption are things which angels desire and are concerned to look into, his reasons in that great affair may be discoverable by the highest, though not by the lowest order of beings: this shown to be probable: it is next explained how well these principles and doctrines of the gospel agree together; from whence we may discern how reasonable and natural the religion of the gospel is. The belief that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and arise to life, is the fundamental article of a Christian's faith. The hopes which nature imparts with respect to our prospects beyond the grave considered: also how these hopes are supported, confirmed, and enlarged by the gospel. Conclusion: the question put, who is this who was subject to death, and yet had power over death? How could so much power and weakness meet together? An-

swered; he was a man, and therefore he died; he was the Son of God; and therefore he rose from the dead, and will give life to all his true disciples. Had the gospel required us to expect from Christ the redemption of our souls and bodies, without giving us any reason to think he was endued with power equal to the task, Christians might have been justly reproached with believing they know not what. That the world was made by the Son of God, is not contrary to reason; and that he who made the world should be able to renew it, is highly consonant to reason: all the mystery lies in this—that so high a person should condescend so far for the sake of man; but it becomes not us to complain of his mysterious love.

DISCOURSE II.

HEBREWS, CHAP. VII.—VERSE 25.

Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

WHEN we consider the great and wonderful work of our redemption, though we cannot account for every step of it to our own reason and understanding, yet neither can we imagine it to be the effect of mere will and arbitrary appointment, and void of all foundation in the reason and propriety of things. All the works of God are works of wisdom; and as far as our capacities give us leave to judge, we discern evident marks of wisdom in them all, and discover a fitness and propriety in every thing with respect to the end which it is intended to serve or promote. If this be so in every instance in which we are able to make any judgment, it is a great presumption that it is and must be so in all other instances, which are too high and great to be viewed and measured by human understanding: and we have one positive argument that it is so, arising from the natural notion we have of God, and of his attributes of wisdom and justice. It is impossible to suppose such a being to do any thing by chance, or in compliance to mere will and humor. No: every act of God is the act of infinite wisdom, and is founded in the necessary reason and propriety of things: and it is as true of the works of grace as it is of the works of nature, that 'in wisdom he has ordained them all.'

It is one thing not to be able to discern the reasons of providence, and another to suppose there is no reason in them. The reasons that made it either necessary or proper for Christ to die for the sins of mankind, may be removed out of our sight: but to suppose that Christ really did die for the sins of the world, and yet that there was no reason or propriety in his so doing, is to be found revealed religion upon a principle destructive of natural religion; for no religion can subsist, with an opinion that God is a being capable of acting without reason.

The publication of the gospel has made an alteration in the scheme of religion, by revealing to us the Son of God, 'whom God hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person; who upholdeth all things by the word of his power:' Heb. i. 2. 3.

The knowlege of the Son of God, of his power and dominion in the creating and upholding all things, became necessary, as the foundation of the faith required to be placed in him as our Redeemer. The character of Redeemer would be but ill supported by any person who had not power equal to the great undertaking. The New Testament doctrines therefore, relating to the dignity and authority of Jesus Christ, are relative to his office of Redeemer; and therefore there was no explicit declaration of them either before or under the Law of Moses.

Natural religion leads us by certain conclusions to the acknowlegement of one supreme intelligent Being, the Author and Creator of all things, and can by no reasoning whatever discover any other being concerned in the making, framing, or governing the world; and therefore all the hopes and fears, in a word, all the religious acts of man, in the state of natural religion, are necessarily and immediately relative to this one supreme Being. But put the case, that natural religion could possibly discover that this one supreme Being had an eternal Son, to whom he had communicated all power and authority, who was the immediate Creator, Governor, and Judge of mankind; I beseech you to consider whether, upon this supposition, there would not necessarily arise an alteration in natural religion; whether the hopes and fears, and all other religious acts

of mankind, would not relate immediately to this their immediate Creator, Governor, and Judge. Can it be reasonably supposed that we were created by the Son of God, that we are now under his government, and shall be finally under his judgment; and at the same time maintained that no service, obedience, or regard is due to him from us his creatures and subjects? If this cannot be maintained consistently with this supposition, the conclusion will be, that the religion of a Christian is a natural and reasonable service, arising from the relation between Christ and mankind, which the gospel has revealed and made known to the world.

When we consider what expectations we have from our Redeemer, and what great promises he has made to us in his gospel, we cannot possibly avoid inquiring who this person is: when we hear his promise to be always present with us to the end of the world, to support us under all our difficulties, it is but a reasonable demand to ask by what authority he does these things: and when we are told that he liveth for ever, and is the Lord of life and of glory, there is no room to doubt of his being 'able to save us.' St. Paul tells us that the Lord Jesus Christ 'shall change our vile bodies, that they may be fashioned like unto his glorious body.' A great expectation this! but consider what the reasonable foundation of this expectation is: St. Paul tells us it is the energy of power with which Christ is endued, 'whereby he is able even to subdue all things to himself.' Our Saviour puts this article upon the same foot: hear his declaration: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live.' In the next verse the reason follows: 'For as the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself:' John v. 25. 26. If the Son has life in himself, even as the Father has life in himself; if he is really endued with power to which all nature submits and obeys, a power sufficient for the creation of the world at first, and for the preservation ever since; we have reason to conclude that he is now as able to restore life as he was at first to give it; to call men from the grave into being, as well as to call them out of nothing at the first creation.

The relation of Christ to mankind as Creator and Governor

considered, the work of redemption could not properly have been undertaken by any other hand: for, if Christ was the immediate Creator and Governor of the world, what reason can you imagine why God should resume this authority out of the hands of his Son, or set up another to have dominion and authority over any part of the creation, which by natural right belonged to him who made all things? Were we to consider one person as our Creator, and another as our Redeemer, it would be extremely to the diminution of the honor and regard due to the Creator, inasmuch as the blessing of redemption would greatly outweigh the benefit of creation; and it would be natural to us to prefer the love that delivered us from the evils and miseries of the world, to that which placed us in them. In the daily service of our church we praise God for creating and preserving us, but above all for his inestimable love in the redemption; which is very consistent with respect to one great benefactor, who both made us and redeemed us: but had any other hand redeemed us, such expression of gratitude to him would have reflected dishonor on the Creator.

St. Paul tells us expressly that Christ is head of the church; a title founded in the right of redemption, 'that in all things he might have the pre-eminence;' that, as he was the head of all creatures in virtue of having created them, so he might be the head of the church, the elect people of God, in virtue of having redeemed them: 'for it pleased the Father, that in him should all fulness dwell;' that is, that Christ should be all in all, the head of the second as well as of the first creation: Coloss. i. 19. According to St. Paul's reasoning here, if any other person had redeemed the world, or if the world had been redeemed without Christ, he would not 'have had the pre-eminence in all things;' which yet he had before sin came into the world; and, consequently, the sin of the world would have been the diminution of the headship and power of Christ. On these principles of the gospel revelation we may discern some propriety in Christ's coming to redeem the world: the work was such, that no person of less power could undertake it; and his relation to the world was such, as made it fit and proper to commit the work to him.

The redemption of mankind is a work which in the event seems to concern men only: but considered as a vindication of

the justice and goodness of God towards his creatures, it is a work exposed to the consideration of every intelligent being in the universe. Whether they may be supposed to inquire into God's dealings with the children of men, we may judge by ourselves. It is little we know of the fall of angels; yet how has that employed human curiosity! for every man considers himself as having an interest in the justice and equity of that supreme Being, under whose government he lives, and by whose judgment he must finally stand or fall. If we doubt whether the superior orders of beings have the like inclination, St. Peter will tell us, 'that the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow—are things the angels desire to look into:' 1 Pet. i. 11. 12. And indeed the method of God's dealing with any rational creature is a common concern to all; and it is for the honor of God's government to be vindicated in the sight of every intelligent being, 'that he may be justified in his saying, and overcome when he is judged.'

If this be so, it must necessarily follow that the redemption by Christ, though it relates immediately to men, must be agreeable to all the reason and relation of things, known or discoverable by the highest intellectual beings; and need I add, that there are many such not discoverable by us?

It is certain that we are but a small part of the intellectual world: what relation we bear to the other parts, or to the whole, we know not; and yet undoubtedly the common Governor of the whole must in his dealings with every part have regard to this common relation, whether we understand it or no. The author of the epistle to the Hebrews tells us, 'that Christ took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.' Angels sinned, and men sinned: men only are redeemed. If God is just, there must be a reason for this, though not within our reach at present; and when we come to know it, perhaps we may be no longer at a loss to know that the sacrifice of Christ was necessary to the salvation of men.

That there are many orders of beings superior to man, is a proposition so agreeable to reason, that there is little room to doubt of it. All these orders are in Scripture comprehended under the general name of 'angel.' What relation these beings

stand in to us in many respects, I will not now inquire: but that they are not unconcerned spectators in the work of our redemption is evident. Our Saviour tells us, 'There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth:' Luke xv. 10. Again: 'He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels:' Rev. iii. 5. Here the angels are mentioned as witnesses of the justice of the judgment, and not merely as attendants to make up the pomp and ceremony of judicature.

Since then the justice and equity of God in redeeming men are things which the angels desire and are concerned to look into, it is evident that his justice and equity, and the reasons of providence in this great affair, may be discernible to the highest order of intellectual beings, though not discoverable by us, the lowest.

That this is probably the case may be learnt from hence; that, where the gospel has revealed to us any of these relations, not discoverable by human reason, so far we can see the reason and propriety of this great work of our redemption.

But let us consider how well these principles and doctrines of the gospel agree together, and how naturally the one flows from the other. When we view the sad condition of mankind, the sin, folly, and misery, which are in the world; and then turn to contemplate the perfections, the wisdom, and the goodness of him who made us; nature raises some hopes in us, that this confusion will some day find a remedy, and ourselves a release, from the goodness and wisdom of him who formed us. I blame not these hopes; they are just, they are natural; but if nature had the knowlege of the Son of God, and could discover that the world was made and is upheld by his power, that we are his immediate creatures and subjects; would it not be altogether as natural to found some hopes on this relation? Should we not be willing to believe that this great person, who made us, would have some compassion on the work of his own hands? Should we not hope to find in him at least an intercessor on our behalf, an 'advocate with the Father?' Should we not be in-

clined to recommend to him all our pleas, to put all our interest into his hands, trusting that he could not want bowels of affection towards the creatures whom he formed after his own image and likeness? I think this would be but natural; and what more does the gospel require of us? It has discovered to us this relation between Christ and the world, between Christ and the church, and requires from us such hope and faith, and such obedience, as naturally flow from this relation; and could it possibly require less? Would it not be absurd to tell us that Christ is Lord of the world that is, and of that which is to come, and not to require us to have hope and confidence in him? Would it not be absurd to tell us that he is the Lord of life and glory, and to bid us expect life and glory through any other hands than his? Would it not be absurd to tell us that all judgment is committed to the Son, and yet no obedience due to him? or, that God has appointed him to be head over all, and yet no honor to be paid him?

From these and the like considerations we may discern how reasonable, how natural the religion of the gospel is. It has indeed opened to us a new scene of things, discovering to us the ever-blessed Son of God, the Creator and Governor of the world: what else it proposes to us results naturally from this relation between Christ and the world. The mysterious work of our redemption itself seems to have arisen from the original relation between the only Son of God, and man the creature of God; and our Christian faith, in every article and branch of it, has a just foundation and support in the power, authority, and pre-eminence of the Son of God. We may well believe he has redeemed us, since we know he made us. And, though all nature seems to frown on us, and to threaten death and destruction, from which no human power or cunning can deliver us; yet our hope is steadfast and immoveable, being placed in him who is 'able to subdue all things to himself.'

This belief, that the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and arise to life, is the fundamental article of a Christian's faith: if this be not well established, our hope and confidence are vain, and the preaching the cross of Christ is foolishness.

Let us reflect a little how our case stands with respect to the

prospect beyond the grave; let us consider what hopes nature furnishes, and how they are supported, confirmed, and enlarged, by the gospel of Christ Jesus.

When we view the world in its present circumstances, and see the misery and oppression that are in it; when we consider that the distresses and sorrows arising from the weakness and the wickedness of men are in number and in weight ten times more than all the sufferings to which we are exposed by the mere frailty of our condition; we can hardly imagine that a wise and just God made the world to be what we find it is. When we look farther, and find that the best men oftentimes fare worst; that even the desire and endeavor to please God frequently exposes them to infinite sorrows in this world; we stand amazed, and are ready to doubt whether these appearances can be reconciled with the belief that God governs the world. But since all nature proclaims the being and the power of God, and the visible things of the creation declare in every language of the world the wisdom and goodness of him who made them; under the force and conviction of this evidence that there is a God, we can find no possible way to account for his justice and goodness towards the children of men, but by supposing that 'he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness:' and since this world evidently is not the scene of this judgment, we conclude there must be another, in which we shall stand before his tribunal. Thus far nature goes: all beyond this is vain philosophy and imagination, founded in conceits which are in vogue to-day, and forgot to-morrow. Scholars may reason of the nature of the soul, and the condition of it when separated from the body; but the common hopes of nature receive no support from such inquiries. But yet something farther seems necessary to give ease to nature in this painful search after life and happiness. The numberless instances of mortality which we hear and see, the remains of those who left the world ages before we came into it, and are still mouldering in their tombs, is undeniable evidence that death destroys this compound being which we call man. How to revive this union nature knows not; and as for those who make the spirits of men in the divided state to be perfect

men, they seem to have got a conclusion without consulting the premises.

Look now into the gospel: there you will find every reasonable hope of nature, nay, every reasonable suspicion of nature, cleared up and confirmed, every difficulty answered and removed. Do the present circumstances of the world lead you to suspect that God could never be the author of such corrupt and wretched creatures as men now are? Your suspicions are just and well founded: God made man upright, but through the temptation of the devil sin entered, and death and destruction followed after.

Do you suspect, from the success of virtue and vice in this world, that the providence of God does not interpose to protect the righteous from violence, or to punish the wicked? The suspicion is not without ground. God leaves his best servants here to be tried oftentimes with affliction and sorrow, and permits the wicked to flourish and abound. The call of the gospel is not to honor and riches here, but to take up our cross and follow Christ.

Do you judge, from comparing the present state of the world with the natural notion you have of God, and of his justice and goodness, that there must needs be another state in which justice shall take place? You reason right; and the gospel confirms the judgment. God has appointed a day to judge the world in righteousness: then those who mourn shall rejoice, those who weep shall laugh, and the persecuted and afflicted servants of God shall be heirs of his kingdom.

Have you sometimes misgivings of mind? Are you tempted to mistrust this judgment, when you see the difficulties which surround it on every side; some which affect the soul in its separate state, some which affect the body in its state of corruption and dissolution? Look to the gospel: there these difficulties are accounted for; and you need no longer puzzle yourself with dark questions concerning the state, condition, and nature of separate spirits, or concerning the body, however to appearance lost and destroyed; for the body and soul shall once more meet to part no more, but to be happy for ever. In this case the learned cannot doubt, and the ignorant may be sure that it is

the man, the very man himself, who shall rise again: for an union of the same soul and body is as certainly the restoration of the man, as the dividing them was the destruction.

Would you know who it is that gives this assurance? It is one who is able to make good his word; one who loved you so well as to die for you; yet one too great to be held a prisoner in the grave. No; he rose with triumph and glory, the first-born from the dead, and will in like manner call from the dust of the earth all those who put their trust and confidence in him.

But who is this, you will say, who was subject to death, and yet had power over death? How could so much weakness and so much strength meet together? That God has the power of life, we know; but then he cannot die: that man is mortal, we know; but then he cannot give life.

Consider; does this difficulty deserve an answer, or does it not? Our blessed Saviour lived among us in a low and poor condition, exposed to much ill treatment from his jealous countrymen: when he fell into their power, their rage knew no bounds: they reviled him, insulted him, mocked him, scourged him, and at last nailed him to a cross, where by a shameful and wretched death he finished a life of sorrow and affliction. Did we know no more of him than this, upon what ground could we pretend to hope that he will be able to save us from the power of death? We might say with the disciples, 'We trusted this had been he who should have saved Israel;' but he is dead, he is gone, and all our hopes are buried in his grave.

If you think this ought to be answered, and that the faith of a Christian cannot be a reasonable faith, unless it be enabled to account for this seeming contradiction; I beseech you then never more complain of the gospel for furnishing an answer to this great objection, for removing this stumbling-block out of the way of our faith. He was a man, and therefore he died: he was the Son of God, and therefore he rose from the dead, and will give life to all his true disciples. He it was who formed this world and all things in it, and for the sake of man was content to become man, and to taste death for all, that all through him may live. This is a wonderful piece of knowlege which God has revealed to us in his gospel; but he has not revealed

it to raise our wonder, but to confirm and establish our faith in him to whom he hath committed all power, 'whom he hath appointed heir of all things.'

Had the gospel required of us to expect from Christ the redemption of our souls and bodies, and given us no reason to think that Christ was endued with power equal to the work, we might justly have complained; and it would have been a standing reproach, that Christians believe they know not what. But to expect redemption from the Son of God, the resurrection of our bodies from the same hand which at first created and formed them, are rational and well-founded acts of faith; and it is the Christian's glory, that he 'knows in whom he has believed.'

That the world was made by the Son of God, is a proposition with which reason has no fault to find: that he who made the world should have power to renew it to life again, is highly consonant to reason. All the mystery lies in this, that so high and great a person should condescend to become man, and subject to death, for the sake of mankind. But are we the fit persons to complain of this transcendent mysterious love? or does it become us to quarrel with the kindness of our blessed Lord towards us, only because it is greater than we can conceive? No; it becomes us to bless and to adore this exceeding love, by which we are saved from condemnation, by which we expect to be rescued from death; knowing that the power of our blessed Lord is equal to his love, and that he is 'able to subdue all things to himself.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE III.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XI.—VERSE 6.

PART I.

CONNEXION of the words of the text with those preceding it explained: hence arise two subjects of inquiry:—1. what are the offences which are generally taken at the gospel of Christ: II. from what sources these offences come. The earliest, and it may probably be the latest objection to the gospel, was the poverty and meanness in which our Saviour appeared. Though he came with such high purposes, and to exact such strict obedience, yet he came with less attendance and show than an ordinary messenger: hence the upbraidings and reproaches he constantly met with throughout his life, and at his death: and so blinded are men with false notions, that this prejudice has prevailed in every age: when Christ *crucified* was preached by St. Paul, he was to the Jews *a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness:* in this case God did not act as the Greeks made their Jupiter to act, in thunder and lightning, or as God is represented in the Old Testament, *with clouds and darkness round about him:* here every thing had a different turn; Christ came in the likeness of a man, and in the form of a servant; whilst his doctrine was framed rather to purify the heart than to exercise the head. But these things the wise and great of this world find difficult to reconcile to their notions of God's wisdom and majesty: they ask why Christ did not appear in the power and majesty of his father—they compare his appearance with that of an ambassador sent by a prince, with honor and a large retinue, to awe and reclaim rebellious subjects—and they ask why, if faith be a means of salvation, more reason for confidence was not given? What foundation there

is in reason for this prejudice considered: no wonder to hear men reason upon the notions that are familiar to them: power and authority are connected with ideas of pomp and splendor; and when we talk of the works of God, we naturally turn to view his wonderful works of Providence: hence men are so slow to discern his hand in the ordinary course of nature, wherein are things familiar to us. The case of Naaman the Syrian stated: not unlike to his folly is theirs who take offence at the poverty and meanness of the Author of our redemption. This prejudice, when searched to the bottom, found to arise from a false conception of the power and majesty of God; as if the success of his purposes depended on the visible fitness of his instruments: with men the case is so; but not with God, whose *foolishness*, says the Apostle, *is wiser than men, and weakness is stronger than men;* teaching us that we should not presume to sit in judgment upon the methods of Providence, since how foolish or how weak soever they may seem to us, they will be found in his hand to be the wisest and the strongest: and this reasoning the Apostle applies to the case before us: however the Jews or however the Greeks conceived of the crucified Jesus, yet to every true believer he is the mighty *power of God to salvation*, because God ordained him to be so; and this gives full efficacy to his Cross, however contemptible and unfit for the purpose it may seem to be. If we would judge truly, the more simple and plain the methods of Providence are, the more do they speak his power; as when he said, *Let there be light, and there was light:* so when our Lord said, *I will, be thou clean*, and the person was cleansed, his divinity shone forth more bright than if he had been assisted by all the powers above. And the same may be said respecting the redemption of the world committed to Jesus, a man of sorrow and affliction, but endued with such mighty powers.

In the next place it is considered, with respect to men, whether the advantages would have been greater, had Christ ap-

peared in greater splendor and with more visible power. One thing is certain, that the majesty of God is not to be approached by human eyes; therefore when it descends to treat with men, it must be veiled under such representations as they can bear: but, it may be said, is there no medium between his immediate presence, and so vile a state both of life and death? No doubt there are many degrees of visible glory, in any of which Christ might have appeared; but none in which he could have come with greater advantage to religion: this shown to be the case. But, it may be said, though he came not with worldly state and temporal dominion, he might at least have exhibited some visible manifestation of his divine authority: in answer to this, his miraculous works are enumerated, than which higher signs of a divine commission cannot be required: under all the meanness of his appearance therefore, the evidence of his divine authority is the same as it would have been had he come in the greatest pomp and power. To us, who are removed at a distance from the scene of action, the evidence is much greater. Had he come in surprising glory, we might have suspected the relations of men who saw and heard every thing while their faculties were lost in astonishment: but now we have the evidence of those who lived with him familiarly, and saw his mighty works without astonishment, being reconciled to them by daily use, and the long-experienced gentleness and love of their master: from his poverty and meanness therefore arises the stability of our faith, which standeth not in the words or works of man's wisdom or power, but in the power and wisdom of him who knows how to produce strength out of weakness.

PART II.

From the offence taken at the mean condition of our Lord, the cross became *to the Jews a stumbling-block:* it became also *foolishness to the Greeks;* for they *sought after wisdom;* and not finding that wisdom which they sought after in the gospel, it was esteemed by them as foolishness. The nature of God, the manner of the soul's existence, the nature of rewards and punishments in a future life, are not philosophically explained in the gospel: yet it is said by some—Who would not have expected from a person sent from God, to have had all difficulties solved which affect the belief and practice of religion? As it is, we are taught only the plain doctrines of morality, and are bid to take his word for the rest. To clear up this great and unreasonable offence against the gospel, three subjects of consideration are proposed. First; this objection does not lie against the gospel of Christ; but, if there be any force in it, it strikes at the wisdom and goodness of God in the creation. As long as men keep to the plain simple points in which religion is concerned, there is no danger of their splitting on these insuperable difficulties: if they seek after God, the whole creation will lead them to him: if they search after the immortality of the soul and the certainty of future retribution, these truths will be suggested to them by their natural sense of good and evil, and their notions of God's wisdom and justice and goodness, compared with the present unequal distribution of rewards and punishments: but if they are not content with knowing that God *is*, without knowing *what* he is; or if, not satisfied with the moral certainty of a future state, they wish to look into the texture of the soul, it is no wonder if they make shipwreck both of their reason and their faith at once; for this knowlege is too high for us; nor has God given us faculties to comprehend such mysteries of nature; not even are the seeds of such knowlege implanted in us, and therefore no culti-

vation can ever produce it. This being the condition of men, it had been to little purpose, if our Lord had attempted to let them into those great secrets. His business was to instruct them in the ways of virtue, awaken them to a sense of goodness, and show them the way to happiness, by setting before them the precepts of God and nature in their true uncorrupted purity; and this he has done, even by the confession of his greatest enemies. It is the great business of a teacher to speak to the sense and understanding of the people; otherwise his words are mere air and sound; and therefore whatever wisdom and knowlege were in our blessed Saviour, it is folly to expect from him any greater degrees of either than we can comprehend: instead of improving the nature of man, he must have destroyed it, and re-created him, to have made him capable of a clear insight into all the mysteries which the curious seem desirous of knowing. If more be required on this head, the cause must be pleaded with God, and not with Christ; we must inquire of God why he made us no wiser. And, it may be said, would it not have been better, if he had done so? To this it may be answered; that I would rather be an angel than a man; but I know of no right I had to be either; and that I am either, is owing purely to the goodness of my Creator. Had God given us only the faculties of men and required of us the service of angels, then indeed we might have complained with some justice. Our present faculties, rightly applied, will lead us to a knowlege of God's being and excellency, and will instruct us in what our reasonable service to him consists: when we know that there is an all-sufficient being, and that it is our duty to serve him, to suspend our duty because we cannot comprehend his nature and manner of existence, is as unreasonable as it would be for a merchant not to trade to the Indies, until he can account to himself for the nature of all the surprising objects of those wealthy regions. God has given us knowlege enough for the foundation of our duty; and if we

use the light we have, we shall be happy: the great mistake is, that men suppose they should have better evidence for the things of another world, could they overcome these difficulties which cross them in a search after nature: and this would be an advantage to religion, if it were so; but that it is not, appears from the following considerations; for, Secondly, the difficulties which arise in considering the natural properties of things, affect not the certainty and reality of their existence: if they did, we could be certain of the real existence of no one thing: there cannot be two more distinct inquiries, than when we examine whether a thing really *is*, and when we examine *what* it is; these things do not at all depend one on the other: as we can examine the properties of some things, without reflecting whether there ever were such things or no, (as for instance, an *exact* circle or square,) so we can examine and come to the certainty of the existence of things without knowing, or attempting to know, their properties; for the peasant knows there is a sun and moon as surely as the astronomer. Nor is this true only in things that are objects of sense; but also in those, the existence of which we collect from reason. From visible effects to invisible causes the argument is conclusive; though in many cases it extends only to the reality of the cause, and does not in the least lead to the knowlege of its nature: thus when we see distempers cured by plants or drugs, we are sure that some virtue is in them, on which the effect depends, though what, we seldom or never can tell.

Now, in the case before us, what sort of knowlege is necessary to support religion in the world? If we are sure there is a God who will judge the world, is not that a sufficient foundation for holiness? if such an event will certainly take place, it concerns not us to know *how*. Since then our Saviour has given us the best evidence of the certainty of a future state and of the soul's existence after death, it is impertinent and unphilosophical to confront it with difficulties arising from our conceptions as to

the nature and manner of these things: it is in truth to set up ignorance against knowlege.

Since, then, religion depends on the certainty and reality of these and other like articles, and not in the least on a knowlege of their nature or philosophical account of them, it had been absurd in our Saviour, who was a preacher of religion only, to have entered into those difficulties which did not belong to his province; and it is ridiculous in us to expect the solution of them in the gospel, when, if solved, they would not serve any one point in which the gospel is concerned. It may however be said—all this is true, where the existence of things is out of doubt; but when this is doubtful, these seeming contradictions, which arise in considering the nature of things, shake greatly the presumption of their existence. In the third place, therefore, it is shown that the gospel has given us the best evidence of our own immortality and a future state, that can be conceived or desired. Two things on which our resurrection to life depends; as we learn from our Saviour's answer to the Sadducees—*ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God.* We can desire to know nothing more than that he *can* raise us, and that he *will:* the first is to be learnt from our natural notions of God, the second from his declared will, i. e. the holy Scriptures: as to the power of God, it cannot be brought into question without throwing off all pretence to natural religion; it remains therefore to inquire after his will: now we have our Saviour's promise for our resurrection often repeated: he also raised persons from the dead, and he raised himself; he therefore has the power: take both propositions then together, and they will amount to this, that he who has the power of raising the dead has promised to raise us. God, we know, cannot lie, and therefore must ratify every word which he spoke by his holy child Jesus; and hence arises a security which no doubts can shake. As to difficulties in nature and philosophy, he answered them when he himself rose from the grave.

PART III.

The prejudices which men conceive against the gospel vary according to the views under which they consider it: as some take offence at the gospel for not clearing up the doubts and difficulties which religion contained before, so others take offence at the new doctrines introduced by it: this attached itself even to many of Christ's disciples: what purpose of religion or morality, it is said, can be served by our receiving articles of faith which we cannot understand? This charge, if it were as true as it is heavy, might possibly shake the foundations of the gospel: but to set the matter in a clear light, we must consider the different notions of the word *mystery*, as used in the gospel, and as in common use amongst men at this time: hence it will appear, I. that the objection does not reach the gospel sense of the word, and cannot affect its mysteries: II. that the use and sense of the word which is liable to this objection, does not belong to the gospel; as it does not contain any such mysteries as may justify the complaint.

First then, the whole design of the gospel in the salvation of mankind, is styled a mystery, because *it was kept secret since the world began*, in allusion to this time of secresy and silence; but on the revelation of it by Jesus Christ it is no longer looked on as such, but as the *manifestation* of God's will and goodness to men; see Rom. xvi. 26.: the opposition here is between mystery and revelation; in this sense therefore there can lie no objection against the gospel. As the gospel itself is in this sense styled a mystery, so also are the several parts of it: *I show you a mystery*, says St. Paul, *we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.* Other instances of the same kind enumerated. Against this gospel-sense of mystery the common objections have no place. It is therefore, in the second place, shown that the notion of mysteries, against which the objection lies, does not belong to the gospel. It represents a

mystery as a thing inconceivable, and altogether irreconcileable to human reason: but such mysteries are not in the gospel of Christ: men may have run into contradictions by endeavoring to explain the mysteries of God farther than he has explained them; but let not the gospel be charged with their errors: nothing is more fatal to religion than attempts to explain and account for the hidden wisdom of God on principles of human reason. Concerning the persons of the Godhead there are indeed great mysteries, which are not revealed: God has not told us *how* his Son and his Spirit dwell in him, or *how* they came from him: these therefore are properly mysteries, hidden in his secret wisdom, and which we are no where called on to inquire into: we might readily take God's word for them, without entering into natural and philosophical inquiries; especially as they are well qualified to be objects of faith. Common sense might teach us not to call God to account, or pretend to enter into the reason of his doings.

DISCOURSE III.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XI.—VERSE 6..

Blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.

PART I.

In the beginning of this chapter we read, that the Baptist sent two of his disciples to Christ, to inquire of him whether he was indeed the great Prophet so long expected by the people, and foretold by the prophets, or whether they were still to expect and wait the coming of another. Our Saviour detained the disciples of John, till he had made them eye-witnesses of the mighty power that was in him. They saw, at the command of his word, the blind receive sight, the lame walk, the lepers cleansed, the deaf restored to hearing, and the dead raised up to life again: they saw likewise, that these mighty powers were exercised without giving the least suspicion of any worldly design; that no court was made to the great or wealthy by singling them out either for patients or for disciples. The benefit of the miracles was chiefly the lot of the poor; and as they were better disposed to receive the gospel, so were they preferred before the rich and mighty to be the disciples of Christ. When the Baptist's disciples had seen and heard these things, our Saviour thought them sufficiently enabled to satisfy John in the inquiry on which he had sent them: 'Go,' says he, 'and show John those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them.' Then follow imme-

diately the words of the text: 'And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.'

The close connexion of the text with the last words of the fifth verse shows us what sort of persons our Saviour had in his eye, when he spoke of the offence taken at him in the world: 'The poor,' says he, 'have the gospel preached to them: and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me.' As if he had said, The poor are ready to embrace the gospel, and happy are in this, yea, happier far, notwithstanding their present uncomfortable condition, than the honorable and the learned, who are too great, and in their own opinion too wise, to hearken to the instructions of the gospel.

The words thus explained lead us to inquire,

First, What are the offences which are generally taken at the gospel of Christ:

Secondly, From what source these offences come.

The poverty and meanness in which our Saviour appeared, was the earliest, and may probably be the latest, objection to the gospel. He came from God to convert and to save the world, to declare the purposes and the commands of the Almighty, and to exact obedience from every creature: but he came with less attendance and show than if he had been an ordinary messenger from the governor of a province. Hence it is that we so often find him upbraided either with the meanness of his parentage, the obscurity of his country, or the present necessity of his circumstances: 'Is not this the Carpenter's son?' says one; 'Can any good come out of Nazareth?' says another; 'or any prophet out of Galilee?' says a third. And when they saw him oppressed with sufferings, and weighed down with afflictions, they openly insulted his sorrow, and triumphed over his fond pretences to save the world: 'Thou,' say they, 'that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself: If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.' And so blinded are men with the notions of worldly greatness, and so apt to conceive of the majesty of God according to their own ideas of power and dignity, that this prejudice has prevailed in every age. The Apostle to the Corinthians 'preached Christ crucified;' but he was to the Jews 'a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness:' for the Jews 'required a sign,' a visible temporal deliverance, and

had no notion, much less any want, as they could apprehend, of such a Saviour as Jesus. The 'Greeks sought after wisdom,' and thought that, if God were indeed to redeem the world, he would act more suitably to his power and wisdom; whenever they made their Jupiter speak, his voice was thunder, and lightning was his appearance, and he delivered oracles not to be communicated to vulgar ears. So in the Old Testament, when God speaks, 'clouds and darkness are round about him,' and his presence and his voice are terrible. But here every thing had a different turn; the appearance was in the likeness of a man, and in the form of a servant; and, as he came in like a servant, he went out like a slave, 'he was esteemed stricken, and his departure was taken for misery.' His doctrine was framed rather to purify the heart, and to give wisdom to the simple, than to exercise the head, and furnish matter for the curious and learned; to be a general instruction and a common rule of life to all men, and not to satisfy the vanity of worldly wisdom in inquiries above its reach. With him the precepts of virtue are the principles of wisdom and holiness, the greatest ornament of the mind of man.

But these things the wise and the great men of the world find hard to reconcile with the wisdom and majesty of God, according to their notions of wisdom and power. Why did not Christ, say they, appear in the power and majesty of his Father? Would not the embassy have been more worthy both of God and of him? Would any prince, who had a mind to reclaim his rebellious subjects to obedience, not rather choose to send a person of honor with a suitable retinue, whose appearance might command respect and credit, than an ambassador clothed in rags and poverty, fit only to create in the rebels a greater contempt both of himself and his prince? If it was the purpose of God that the world through faith should be saved, would not the world more securely and readily have confided in one whose very appearance would have spoken his dignity, than in one who seemed to be even more miserable than themselves, and not able to rescue himself from the vilest and most contemptible death?

But let us now, in the second place, consider what foundation there is in reason for this great prejudice.

It is no wonder to hear men reason on the notions and

ideas which are familiar to them. Great power and great authority are connected with the ideas of great pomp and splendor; and when we talk of the works of God, our minds naturally turn themselves to view the great and miraculous works of providence: and this is the reason why men are slow to discern the hand of God in the ordinary course of nature, where things, being familiar to us, do not strike with wonder and admiration.

When Naaman the Syrian came to the prophet of Israel to be cured of his leprosy, Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, 'Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again unto thee, and thou shalt be clean.' The haughty Syrian disdained the easy cure, and scorned the prophet: Is this your man of God, and this his mighty power, to send me to a pitiful river of Israel? 'Behold,' says he, 'I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and strike his hand over the place, and recover the leper. Are not Abana and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned, and went away in a rage.' But his servants, not a little wiser than their master, thus reason the case with him: 'My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith unto thee, wash and be clean?' Upon this gentle rebuke his stomach came down, and he condescended to follow the Prophet's direction: 'and his flesh came again like the flesh of a young child, and he was clean.' Not unlike to Naaman's folly is theirs, who take offence at the poverty and meanness of the Author of our redemption. His sentiments and theirs agree: he expected to have seen some surprising wonder wrought for his cure; and, when he was bid only to wash, he thought there could be nothing of God in so trifling a remedy. And is not this their sense, who think that so obscure, so mean a person as Jesus, could never be the messenger of God on so great an errand as the salvation of the world? who thus expostulate, Why came he not in a majesty suitable to his employment, and then we would have believed him; but how can we expect to be raised to the glory of God by him who was himself the scorn and contempt of men?

If we search this prejudice to the bottom, we shall find that it arises from a false conception of the power and majesty of God, as if the success of his purposes depended on the visible fitness of the instruments he made choice of. With men we know the case is so; they must use means which they can judge to be adapted to the end they aim at, if they intend to prosper in what they undertake: but with God it is otherwise. To stop the current even of the smallest river, banks must be raised, and sluices cut, when the work is done by man: but in the hand of God the rod of Moses was more than sufficient to curb the rage of the sea, and force it to yield a passage to his people. 'The foolishness of God,' says the Apostle, 'is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men:' teaching us that we should not presume to sit in judgment on the methods of Providence; since, how foolish or how weak soever they may seem to us, they will be found in his hand to be the wisest and the strongest. And this reasoning the Apostle applies to the case now before us: 'The cross of Christ was a stumbling-block to the Jews, and to the Greeks foolishness; but unto all them which are called, the power of God, and the wisdom of God; because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God stronger than men.' However the Jews, or however the Greeks, conceived of the crucified Jesus, yet to every believer he is the mighty 'power of God to salvation,' because God ordained him so to be; and this ordination gives full efficacy to the cross of Christ, however in itself contemptible, and to all human appearance unfit for the purpose. The waters of Jordan had no natural efficacy to cleanse a leper; in the rod of Moses there was no power to divide the sea: but when ordained by God to these purposes, the sea fled back at the touch of Moses's rod, and the leprosy of Naaman was purged by the so much despised waters of Israel. If we would judge truly, the more simple and plain the methods of Providence are, the more do they speak the power of the Almighty. When God said, 'Let there be light, and there was light,' his uncontrollable power more evidently appeared, than if all the angels of heaven had been employed to produce it. When our Lord said, 'I will, be thou clean,' and the person was cleansed, his divinity shone forth more brightly than

if he had commanded all the powers above visibly to assist him. So likewise, when God committed the redemption of the world to Jesus, a man of sorrow and affliction, and of no form or comeliness, and gave him the power of doing such works as never man did, in confirmation of his commission, he appeared as plainly in him, as if he had clothed him with visible majesty and power. If we consider him afflicted and tormented, and given up to a cruel death, it proves indeed that he was weak and mortal; but still God is strong, and not the less able to establish the word which he spoke by this weak, this mortal man.

As to this part of the offence then, so far as the majesty and power of God are concerned, it proceeds from very wrong notions in both cases, and supposes that the majesty of God wants the same little supports of outward pomp and grandeur as that of men does, and that his power depends upon the fitness of instrumental or material causes, as human power plainly does; whereas the majesty and power of God are never more clearly seen than when he makes choice of the 'weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty.'

Let us then in the next place consider, with respect to men, whether the advantages on their side would have been greater, had Christ appeared in greater splendor, and with more visible power and authority.

How far the imaginations of some men may rove on such inquiries as these, or what degrees of splendor and glory they would judge sufficient for their purpose, I cannot tell. This we are sure of, that the majesty of the Almighty is not to be approached by human eyes; that therefore, whenever it descends to treat with men, it must be veiled and obscured under such representations as men can bear. This is true, you will say; but is there no medium between the immediate presence of God, and his appearing in the form of a servant, and dying, not as the children of men commonly die, but as the vilest and most profligate criminal? Many degrees there are, no doubt, of visible glory, in any of which Christ might have appeared, but in none with greater advantage to religion than that in which he came. Suppose he had come, as the Jews expected, in the form of a mighty prince, and in that situation

had propagated his faith and doctrine; what would the unbelievers then have said? How often should we have been told before now, that our religion was the work of human policy, and that our prince's doctrine and dominions were extended by the same sword? Was ever any religion the better thought of for having been preached at the head of an army? This is certain, that, to make religion a rational act of the mind, it cannot be conveyed to us in too easy and familiar a manner: the less awe we have of our teacher, the more freedom we shall exercise in weighing and examining his doctrines. And on this account our Saviour's appearance was in the most proper form, as it gave to men the greatest scope and liberty of trying and searching into his doctrines and pretences: and therefore his meanness and poverty should least of all be objected by those who seem to contend for nothing more than to clear religion from fears and prejudices.

But perhaps they will say, we wanted him not to appear in worldly state and glory, or to exercise temporal dominion on earth; we would have been contented with a visible, though an inferior kind of manifestation of his divine authority. 'O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have written!' What think ye of giving sight to the blind; of opening the ears of the deaf; of loosening the tongue that was dumb; of restoring health to the sick; of raising the dead to life again; of raising even himself from the grave, and abolishing the scandal of the cross by a visible victory and triumph over death? What do ye call these things? What do they manifest to you? Are these the works of that mean man, that wretched, that crucified mortal, of whom we have been speaking? Do slaves and servants, nay, do princes and the greatest of the children of men, use to perform such works? If not, these are the very manifestations of divine power and authority which you require. Nor can it, I believe, enter into the heart of man to contrive any greater signs to ask of any person pretending to a divine commission, than these which our Saviour daily and publicly gave the world of his authority. Had he appeared with all the visible power and glory which you can conceive, yet still you cannot imagine what greater works than these he could possibly perform: and therefore the evidence now, under

all the meanness of his appearance, is the same for his divine authority and commission, as it would have been, had he come in the greatest pomp of glory and power,

As to us, I think, who are removed at a distance from the scene of this action, the evidence is much greater. Had he come in surprising glory, we might have suspected the relations of men, who, we might well think, saw and heard every thing under the greatest astonishment, and, like St. Paul, when he was caught up to the third heavens, could hardly tell whether they were in the body, or out of the body. But now we have the evidence of men who lived and conversed with him familiarly, who saw all his mighty works, and saw them without surprise or astonishment, being reconciled to them by daily use, and the long-experienced gentleness and love of their Master; and therefore they very justly introduce their accounts with this assurance, 'that they relate that only which they had heard, which they had seen with their eyes, which they had looked on, and which their hands had handled, of the word of life.' So far are we then from having any just cause of offence in the poverty and meanness of our blessed Lord, that from those circumstances arises the great stability of our faith, and this comfortable assurance, that our faith standeth not in the words or in the works of man's wisdom and power, but in the power and in the wisdom of the Almighty, who knows how to produce strength out of weakness.

DISCOURSE III.

PART II.

I HAVE already examined the first and great prejudice against the gospel, arising from the poverty and meanness of our blessed Lord, and the low condition of life in which he appeared in the world, and the wretched circumstances which put an end to it; and showed it to be so far from being a just offence against the gospel, that, when fairly considered, it serves to recommend religion to us with all possible advantage, and the

more eminently to set forth the love of Christ, and the wisdom and goodness of God, in the gospel.

It was from the offence taken at the mean condition of our Lord, that the cross became a 'stumbling-block to the Jews.' It became also, as the Apostle says, 'foolishness to the Greeks:' for they 'sought after wisdom;' and not finding the wisdom they sought after in the gospel, it was esteemed by them as foolishness.

The great articles on which all religion depends, are the nature of God, the immortality of the soul, and the certainty of future rewards and punishments in another life after this. These things have ever exercised the wit and learning of the considering part of mankind, and philosophy has furnished difficulties on every side; and were they well cleared up, it is thought religion would want no other support. But in vain do you search the gospel of Christ for a solution of these difficulties: he has not so much as entered into them, or once attempted to give an account of the nature or essence of God, or of a human soul, or to consider the difficulties that are urged by the schools against its separate existence from the body. Future rewards and punishments he has indeed fully asserted; but, as to the nature and manner of them, and the soul's existence in each state, he has left them involved in the same intricacies in which he found them. And yet, say the disputers of this world, who would not expect from a person sent from God to have all his difficulties solved which affect the belief and practice of religion? We are bid to be good and holy, and are promised immortality: so far it is well. But did he not know what doubts exercise the most learned men concerning the nature of God, and of the soul, and its passage to another world, and concerning the place and condition of that other world? Why were not these doubts cleared? Had he opened to us this dark scene of nature, and made us to understand the contexture of the soul, and its manner of subsisting out of the body; had he taught us to comprehend the state and nature of the other world; such doctrines, such discoveries would have been sufficient evidence of the divine wisdom: but now we are only taught the plain doctrines of morality, and are bid to take his word for our immortality.

To clear up this great and unreasonable offence against the gospel, I desire you would consider with me the following particulars:

First, That the objection does not lie properly against the gospel of Christ; but if there be any sense in it, it must rise higher, and strike at the wisdom and goodness of God in the creation: for, if any fault is to be found in this matter, it is not with Christ for not teaching us more wisdom than we are capable of, but with God for not making us wiser than we are. And hence it will appear that the objection is both impious and senseless.

Secondly, That this objection, allowing it its full force, does no way affect the belief or practice of religion; because religion depends intirely on the certainty of the soul's immortality, and of a future state of rewards and punishments; which certainly no way depends on the knowlege of the nature of the things themselves, since we are and may be certain of many things, the nature of which we neither do nor can know. And hence it will appear that the difficulties arising from the consideration of the nature of these things cannot affect our belief of the certainty of them, if it be supported by proper evidence; and, consequently, that religion is no way concerned to remove these difficulties. And,

Thirdly, That the gospel has given us the greatest evidence for the certainty and reality of these things, that can be thought on or desired. And hence it will appear that the doctrines of the gospel are such as are adapted to the service of religion, and as might be expected from a teacher divinely inspired.

And, first, Let it be considered that this objection does not lie against the gospel of Christ; but if there be any force in it, it strikes immediately at the wisdom and goodness of God in the creation.

As long as men keep to the plain simple points in which religion is concerned, there is no danger of their splitting on these insuperable difficulties. If they seek after God, the whole creation will lead them to him; 'for the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and godhead.' If they search after the immortality of

the soul, and the certainty of a future state of rewards and punishments, these truths will be suggested to them from their own natural sense of good and evil, and the notions of God's wisdom and justice and goodness, compared with the present unequal distributions of rewards and punishments; which can be accounted for on no other foot, nor reconciled to the natural sense God has implanted in us of the difference of good and evil, and the notions we have of his excellency and perfection. But if they launch out into philosophical inquiries, and, not content to know that God is, without knowing what he is, endeavor to pry into the nature and manner of the existence of the Almighty; or if, not satisfied with the moral certainty of a future state, they want to look into the contexture of the soul, and to see there the natural seeds of immortality; it is no wonder if they make shipwreck both of their reason and their faith at once: for this knowlege is too high for men. God has not given us faculties to enable us to comprehend these mysteries of nature; and therefore we must always of necessity wander out of the way, and be bewildered, when we search after them. For let any man consider whence it is that the difficulty of these inquiries ariseth: it is not for want of teaching, for all the teaching in the world will not enable men to comprehend the things of which they can form no notions or ideas. And this is the case: the seeds of this knowlege are not implanted in our nature, and therefore no cultivation can ever produce it. There is nothing which ever fell under the notice of our senses, to which the existence and being of God can be likened, nothing that bears any proportion of similitude to the natural frame and make of our souls: and therefore it is impossible to represent these things to the mind of man; for it is not in the power of any sound of words to create new notions or ideas in our mind, or to convey new knowlege without them. God has set bounds to our knowlege by limiting our faculties, beyond which our utmost care and diligence, however assisted, cannot advance. Whatever wisdom or excellency of knowlege may be in our teacher, it is impossible he should infuse more into us than we are capable of receiving; as a vessel can never receive more than its measure, though it be filled out of the sea.

This being the state and condition of men, it had been to little purpose if our blessed Lord had attempted to let them into the knowlege of those great secrets of nature, which the curious and learned are so desirous of prying into. His business was to instruct them in the ways of virtue and holiness, to awaken their sleepy souls and rouse their stupid consciences to a sense of goodness, to show them the way to peace and happiness, by setting before them the precepts of God and nature in their true uncorrupted purity: and this he has done, even by the confession of his greatest enemies, who in this part have nothing to object, but that his laws are too good and too holy for their observance. It is the great excellency of a teacher to speak to the sense and understanding of the people; and whenever he rises above them, he is lost in the clouds, and his words are mere air and sound: and therefore, whatever wisdom and knowlege were in our blessed Saviour, it is folly to expect from him any greater degrees of either than we are capable of comprehending. As he was our prophet and teacher, it was his business to be understood: and he forbore teaching us the deep mysteries of nature, for the same reason that we do not teach children algebra, not that we envy them the knowlege, but that we know they are incapable of it. Instead of improving the nature of man, he must have destroyed it, and new created him, to have made him capable of a clear insight into all the mysteries which the curious seem desirous of knowing. And, could he have given us all the knowlege we thirst after, yet still the way to happiness would be the same, and we could do nothing to set forward our salvation, which he has not already both instructed and enabled us to do: and therefore, as the case stands, he has fully performed the office of a divine teacher, having fully instructed us 'in the things which make for our peace.'

If you will press this argument any farther, you must plead the cause with God, and not with Christ: he has taught you all that you are capable of knowing; and you must inquire of God why he made you no better and no wiser. And had it not, you will say, been better, if God had given us such enlarged faculties, as might have enabled us to surmount all difficulties of this kind? If you ask me, I can readily answer

that I had rather I were an angel than a man; but I know of no right I had to be either; and that I am either is owing purely to the goodness and beneficence of my Creator. Had he left me still in the lump of clay out of which I was formed, he had done me no injury, nor could any complaint have been formed against him on my behalf. For what I have, I have reason to be thankful; for what I have not, I have no reason to complain.

Had God indeed given us only the faculties of men, and required of us the service of angels, we might then with some justice have lamented the unequal weight: but now that he requires nothing of us but what we are able to perform, and what, according to our present degree of understanding, it is highly reasonable we should perform, it is great perverseness to hang back for want of more light, and a greater capacity to understand what it is no way necessary for us to understand. Our present faculties, if rightly applied, will lead us to a certainty of the being of a God, to the knowlege of his excellency and perfection, and will instruct us wherein our reasonable service to him does consist: and shall we, when we know there is an all-sufficient Being, and that it is our duty to serve him—shall we, I say, suspend our duty because we meet with great difficulties in trying to comprehend his nature and manner of existence? As weak as we are, we may assuredly know, 'that God will one day judge the world in righteousness, and reward every man according to his doings:' and shall we not listen to this great motive to obedience, because we are not able to know how the soul can act distinctly from the body, or how it can be united to it again? It would be altogether as reasonable for a merchant not to trade to the Indies, though he is sure there is great wealth and riches there, till he can account to himself for the nature of all the surprising objects in that other world; or for a man not to eat, though he is sure it would nourish and support his life, till he can see the reason of nutrition, and give an account of all the secret ways by which nature performs the work.

God has given us knowlege sufficient to be the foundation of our duty; and if we will use the light we have, we shall be happy. The great mistake which men commit in reflecting

on these matters, is, that they suppose they should have better evidence for the things of another world, could they overcome these difficulties, which cross them perpetually in the search after nature: and this would indeed be a real advantage to religion, if it were so; but that it is not, will appear in the following considerations: for,

Secondly, The difficulties which arise in considering the natural properties of things, do no way affect the certainty and reality of their existence: if they did, we could be certain of the real existence of no one thing; since there is nothing but what affords us very great difficulties, when we come to account for the nature and properties of it. Let what will be the subject, I think there cannot be two more different inquiries, than when we examine whether the thing really is, and when we examine what it is: they are inquiries which do not at all depend one on the other. We can examine the properties of some things without so much as reflecting whether there ever were such things or no. When the mathematician considers the properties of an exact circle or square, it matters him not whether there be such perfect figures in the world or no; nor does he trouble himself to inquire. So, on the other hand, we can examine and come to the certainty of the existence of things, without knowing, or attempting to know, their natures and properties. The peasant knows there is a sun and a moon as well as the astronomers; and his certainty as to their existence is as great and as well-grounded as theirs. Nor is this only true in things which are objects of sense, but will hold likewise with respect to such things, the existence of which we collect from reason. From visible effects to invisible causes the argument is conclusive; though in many cases it extends only to the reality of the cause, and does not in the least lead us to the knowlege of the nature of it. When we see distempers cured by the use of plants or of drugs, some virtue we are sure there is in them, on which the effect depends, though what, we seldom or never can tell. This being the case then, that we can arrive at the knowlege of the existence of things, when we are perfectly ignorant of their natures and properties; and can, on the other side, examine and know the properties of things without considering whether they exist

or no; it is plain that these are distinct acts of knowlege, which do not depend on each other, and that we may be certain as to the reality of things, however we may be puzzled and confounded when we enter into the consideration of their nature.

And now pray consider, as to the case before us, what sort of knowlege it is that is necessary to support religion in the world. If we are sure there is a God who will judge the world, is not that a sufficient foundation for holiness? Does it signify any thing, as to the necessity of our obedience, to inquire into the manner or nature of his being? Does not the whole of religion evidently depend on this question, whether there certainly be a God who will judge the world? And, if it appears there is, is it of any consequence to say there are great difficulties in conceiving how these things can be? For, if they certainly will be, they will be some way or other, no doubt; and it concerns not us to know which way. Since therefore our Saviour has given the greatest evidence that can be of the certainty of a future state and the soul's existence after death, it is impertinent and unphilosophical to confront this evidence with difficulties arising from our conceptions as to the nature and manner of these things: it is in truth to set up ignorance against knowlege; for our difficulties spring from our ignorance of nature, which is an argument we ought rather to be ashamed of, than to bring into competition with the clear evidence we have for the certainty and reality of the things themselves. Were this duly considered, it would set the great controversy of religion on the right foot, which ought to turn on this single point, whether there be sufficient evidence of a future state or no? For if such a state there be, let our conceptions concerning it be clear or not clear, most certainly we shall be brought to account for all we do; which is enough, I think, to make us careful what we do. And this is the main concern of religion, and that which will secure whatever is necessary to it.

Since then religion evidently depends on the certainty and reality of a future state of rewards and punishments, and other the like articles, and not in the least on the knowlege of the nature or the philosophical account of these things; it had

been absurd in our Saviour, who was a preacher of religion only, a teacher sent from God, to have entered into those difficulties, which did not at all belong to his province. And, since neither the practice of religion would have received any advantage by the discussion of these doubts—for if we had the knowlege of angels, and saw the heavens as plainly as they do, yet the same virtue and holiness, without any change, would be necessary to carry us thither —nor the motives of religion would have gained any new strength; since the evidence for the reality of a future state is not affected by these doubts; it is ridiculous to expect the solution of them in the gospel, when, if solved, they would not serve any one point in which the gospel is concerned, but would end in mere philosophy and speculation.

But perhaps it may be said that all this is true indeed, where the existence of things is out of doubt: in that case no difficulties can destroy the evidence of their existence; but where the existence of things is doubtful, there the seeming contradictions which arise in considering the nature of the things, do mightily shake the presumption of their existence. This is a fair state of the case, and we ought to join issue on it.

Let us then proceed, in the third place, to show that the gospel has given us the greatest evidence of our own immortality, and of a future state, that can be thought on or desired. There are two things on which our resurrection to life depends, as we learn from our Saviour's answer to the Sadducees: 'Ye do err,' says he, 'not knowing the Scriptures, nor the power of God:' which answer is a very clear one; for we can desire no more than to know that God certainly can raise us, and that he certainly will. The first is to be learnt from our natural notions of God; the second from the Scripture, which is the declaration of his will to mankind. As to the power of God, it cannot be brought into question without throwing off all pretence even to natural religion; for if you allow God that he made the world, and formed man into a living soul in the beginning, you cannot deny but that he, who made man out of nothing at first, can as easily make him again, after death has dissolved the vital union. It remains then to inquire, after the will of God, whether he, who cer-

tainly can, certainly will raise us at the last day? The time will not permit me to enter largely into the argument; and therefore I shall rest it on one, but that a very clear point. It will not be denied but that we have our Saviour's promise and word for our resurrection often repeated in the gospel: and consider, pray, did he not raise many dead to life again? Did he not at last raise himself from the grave, after he had been three days buried? Is it not plain then, on the gospel account, that he had the power of raising the dead? and is it not as plain that he has promised to raise us? Take both propositions together then, and they will amount to this; that he, who has the power of raising the dead, has promised and declared that he will raise us from the dead. God, we know, cannot lie, and therefore must ratify every word which 'he spoke by his holy child Jesus:' and hence arises a security which no doubts can shake. Besides, as to difficulties in nature and philosophy, he has not indeed taught us to answer them; but he fully answered them himself, when he came from the grave; as he who got up and walked, baffled all the philosophers' arguments against motion.

It is true, you will say, this is very good evidence, but you find it hard to believe: and perhaps you might have been as hard of belief if our Saviour had reasoned never so philosophically. The question is, whether any objection lies against the gospel for overlooking the difficulties which learned men raise? I have showed that none can lie, and that the gospel has given a much better evidence than that which is desired: and this is sufficient to remove the offence taken on the account of this supposed defect in the gospel. If you believe not the gospel, that alters not the case: the evidence is not the worse for that; for neither would you believe perhaps, 'though one rose from the dead.'

DISCOURSE III.

PART III.

THE prejudices which men are apt to conceive against the gospel, are of different kinds, according to the different views

under which they consider it. When they set themselves to examine the pretensions it has to be a divine revelation, they stumble at the meanness and poverty of its author; imagining that, if God were to send a person into the world on so considerable an errand, he would clothe him with a majesty becoming one immediately commissioned by himself, and which might better support the great undertaking: or if they consider the gospel as the word of God, given to men for their instruction in all things pertaining to the service of God, they expect to find all their doubts and difficulties removed, which are any way related to the cause of religion; such, for instance, as relate to the nature of the soul, its manner of subsisting out of the body, and to the nature and condition of the future state which we are bid to expect: and not finding these difficulties considered and removed, they are apt to conclude that this revelation has not all the marks of wisdom which are to be expected in one coming immediately from God.

These offences have been already considered: but as some are offended at the gospel for not clearing the doubts and difficulties which encumbered the notions of religion before, so others take offence at the new doctrines introduced into religion by the gospel, and complain of the hardship put on them in requiring them to believe things which are not suggested to them by natural reason, nor are to be maintained by it. Even of our Saviour's disciples we find many offended at his doctrine, and complaining to each other, 'This is an hard saying; who can hear it?' And so far did their prejudice prevail, 'that they went back, and walked no more with him.'

The gospel, it is said, contains many mysterious truths: and what purpose of religion can be served by our receiving articles of faith which we do not understand? Shall we be the better men for it? Will it make us more just, or holy, or beneficent to our brethren? Will it promote the honor of God to represent him as requiring such conditions from us, the end or use of which we cannot discern? Or, will it recommend religion to the world? Will men be the more forward to submit, when they must first renounce their sense and understanding, and cease to be rational, in order to be religious?

This is a very heavy charge, and were it as true as it is

heavy, might possibly shake the foundations of the gospel. But to set this matter in a clear light, I must desire you to observe the different notions which belong to the word mystery in the use of the gospel, and in vulgar use among men at this time; and by thus distinguishing the use or sense of the word, it will appear,

First, That the objection does not reach the gospel sense or use of the word, nor can affect the mysteries contained in the gospel: and,

Secondly, That the use and sense of the word, which is liable to this objection, does not any way belong to the gospel; nor are there any such mysteries in the gospel as may justify the complaint made against them.

First, then, If you look into the sacred writers, you will find that the whole design of the gospel, the dispensation of providence in the salvation of mankind, is styled a mystery; 'the hidden wisdom of God, which was kept secret since the world began:' a mystery it is called, because it was kept secret since the world began, God not having opened or declared his gracious purposes before the coming of Christ. With respect to this time of secrecy and silence, the gospel is called a mystery; but on the revelation of it by Christ Jesus, it is no longer looked on as a mystery, but as the manifestation of God's will and goodness to men. Thus you will find St. Paul speaking in the last of the Romans: 'The mystery which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith:' that is, this great work was a mystery in all ages, being kept secret in the counsels of God; but since the coming of Christ it is no longer a mystery, but is manifest and made known to all nations and people. Here then, you see plainly, the opposition is between mystery and revelation: what God has reserved to himself, without communicating the knowlege of it to the world, that is a mystery; what he has revealed is no longer a mystery, but a manifestation of his will and purpose. In this sense, I presume, there lies no objection against the gospel: that it was once hidden in the secret counsels of Providence,

but is now, by the revelation of Christ Jesus, made known to all men, can afford us no matter of complaint, but may administer to us great joy, and be a subject of praise and glory to God; inasmuch as our eyes have seen, and our ears heard, those things, which many righteous men and prophets have 'desired to see, and have not seen them, and to hear, and have not heard them.'

As the gospel itself is in this sense styled a mystery, so are the several parts of it likewise: 'I show you a mystery,' says St. Paul; 'we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.' He did not mean that he would show them what they could not comprehend, but that he would declare to them the purpose of God, which they were ignorant of. The same use of the word you may meet with in our blessed Saviour himself: when he had described the future state of the church in parables to the Jews, and came afterwards to explain them to the disciples, he tells them the reason of his proceeding: 'Because,' says he, 'unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but unto them it is not given.' All futurities, because known only to God, are mysteries; but when revealed, they are no longer so, being made known and manifest. Thus, it is plain, St. Paul uses the word in 1 Cor. xiii. where he joins the gift of prophecy and the knowlege of mysteries together: 'Though I have,' says he, 'the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowlege:' where it is plain what he means by mysteries, since they are to be understood by the gift of prophecy. In the fourth chapter of the same epistle he shows what account we are to make of our pastors and teachers: Let a man,' says he, 'so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.' His meaning is not, that they were preachers of mysteries in the vulgar notion of it, that is, of things which nobody can understand; but that God had intrusted them with his purposes and intentions in the salvation of mankind, which they, like good stewards, were to dispense to the whole family by declaring and revealing the whole will of God.

The same Apostle says, chap. ii. 7. 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery;' and in the next words explains what he means by mystery, 'even the hidden wisdom which God

ordained before the world to our glory:' and in the tenth verse he tells us, this is no longer hidden, but the mystery is laid open; 'God having revealed it unto us by his Spirit.' In the same sense we read of the 'mystery of faith:' where we are not to understand the Apostle to mean incomprehensible articles of faith, but the revelations of God's purposes and designs, which through faith we receive, and are therefore styled the mysteries of faith.

In this sense the gospel is full of mysteries, as containing the secret purposes of God's hidden wisdom in the redemption of the world, which were made manifest by Christ Jesus, 'who brought life and immortality to light.' Against this gospel-sense of mystery the common objections have no force; since mysteries here are not understood to be such things as reason cannot receive, but such things as proceed from the hidden wisdom of God, and are made manifest in the gospel of Christ.

Let us then, in the second place, proceed to show that the notion of mysteries, against which the objection lies, does not belong to the gospel. The objection represents a mystery as a thing inconceivable, and altogether irreconcileable to human reason. But such mysteries there are none in the gospel of Christ. If men, learned or unlearned, have run themselves into contradictions by endeavoring to explain the mysteries of God farther than he has explained them, be that to themselves; let not the gospel be charged with their errors and mistakes. Nothing indeed has proved more fatal to religion than the vain attempts of men to dive into the unrevealed mysteries of God, and to account for, on principles of human reason, the things which proceed from the hidden wisdom of God. All the secret purposes of Providence are, in the sense of the Scripture, mysteries; as likewise all knowlege which God has not revealed. Of such mysteries are there many; but then they concern not us to inquire after; if they did, God would reveal them to us. God has declared to us that he has an only-begotten Son, and that he was the person who came down from heaven for our deliverance: that he has a holy Spirit, who shall sanctify our hearts, and be assisting to us in working out our salvation. This, and agreeable to this,

is the Scripture doctrine: and a man would be put to it to fix any absurdity, or so much as seeming contradiction, on this doctrine, or any thing said concerning it in Scripture. Concerning these persons there are indeed exceeding great mysteries, which are not revealed: God has not told us, or enabled us to conceive, how his Son and his Spirit dwell in him, or how they came from him. These therefore are properly mysteries, which are hidden in the secret wisdom of God, and which we are nowhere called on to inquire after. It is easy, I think, to take God's word, that he has a Son and a Spirit, who dwell with him and in him from all eternity; a Son who came to our assistance, a Spirit who is ever with us to guide us into truth: these things, I say, are easy to be believed, without entering into the difficulties arising from natural and philosophical inquiries, which the Scripture nowhere encourages us to seek after; and as long as men keep close to the rule and doctrine of Scripture, they will find no cause to enter into the great complaints raised against mysteries. The Scripture has revealed indeed wonderful things to us, and for the truth of them has given us as wonderful evidence; so that they are well qualified to be the objects of our faith: for such God designed them, and not for the exercise of our vanity and curiosity, or, as you call it, of our reason. If it is not reasonable to believe God on the gospel evidence, there is an end of all mysteries; but if it is reasonable, there must be an end of all farther inquiries: and I think common sense will teach us not to call God to account, or pretend to enter into the reason of his doings.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE IV.

I CORINTHIANS, CHAP. I.—VERSE 21.

PART I.

THE expression, *in the wisdom of God*, considered. Two main assertions in the text:—I. that the world by wisdom knew not God: II. That it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save believers. The meaning of the term *foolishness of preaching* explained: adopted by the Apostle as having been used by the ancient philosophers in derision of the gospel: he calls on them in their own language to compare their boasted wisdom with this foolishness of preaching, and to judge by the effects. It is hard to account for the great corruption of religion, and the absurd superstitious rites that prevailed in the world; but being once introduced and propagated, it is easy to account for the difficulty of removing them. The corruption of the world was so general, that those who were most endowed with wisdom were unable to extricate themselves or others from the prevailing superstition and idolatry: hence the truth of the first proposition, that 'the world by wisdom knew not God.' With regard to the second proposition, as far as true notions of God and religion go, the truth of it will be admitted: even the enemies of revelation, in spite of themselves, bear witness in some measure to this truth: they now see clearly the great truths of religion; they can now demonstrate the being and attributes of God, and can deduce from thence the worship that is to be paid to him: yet whence this wisdom? are they wiser than all the

sages of antiquity? what single advantage, indeed, have they above them, except this, that in their days the light of the gospel has been spread over the world? But this comparison between the wise and learned of different ages will not determine the case: religion is not made for scholars only, but to influence the general practice of mankind: the great question, therefore, lies between the religion of the world in general as affecting its morality before the coming of Christ, and since: condition of the world in the one instance contrasted with its condition in the other: whence then comes this change? If it is for the better, surely the world is indebted to the hand that rooted out false notions, destructive of virtue and happiness, and planted in their stead such as produce contrary effects. It may be said that the common people are now only influenced by custom and education, like the heathens: suppose the case to be so, and we are even then greatly obliged to revelation. Two things must surely be admitted:—I. that it was the work of a very extraordinary power to root out such ancient errors: II. that it was also an act of great wisdom and goodness to introduce and establish such just principles and notions as throw the weight of custom and education on the side of virtue and true religion. The first proposition cannot be disputed; for the power that destroys the force of custom and education must be very great: no instance in history of a nation reasoned out of its religious errors; and the gospel not having been introduced by external force, the work must be ascribed to a power of another kind. With regard to the second proposition, it may be thought that true religion is no longer religion when it stands by the force of custom and education: yet the precepts of the holy writers call on us *to train up a child in the way he should go,* for this very reason, *that when he is old he will not depart from it;* which, as well as God's declaration to Abraham, Gen. xviii. 19. proves that true religion is not the worse for the support it has

from example and education: but farther, inasmuch as principles, opinions, and practices of mankind will ever be strongly influenced by custom and education, how could the wisdom and goodness of God be manifested more than by directing such influence to the side of virtue, religion, and happiness? The true end of religion is to make men better, and to lead them to perform their duty to God and man: true principles, therefore, being instilled into them, they are as capable of discharging those duties as the greatest philosophers, and as beneficially to the world. It is not to be inferred from hence that religion should be founded on prejudice: the gospel was at first promulgated by the strongest appeal to reason, when it was introduced by the hand of God in signs and wonders, called by the Apostle 'demonstration of the spirit,' in opposition to 'the wisdom of the world;' and it stands on the same reason still, though it may be maintained under the natural influence which custom and education have on mankind: hence, perhaps, we may see the reason why miracles were so frequent in the beginning of the gospel, and why they afterwards ceased: they were necessary till truth had possession of the world; but truth, thoroughly established, was left to be propagated by the natural means of instruction and education. Any one may see that evil is produced by false and corrupt principles, which owe not their influence to reason, but to the possession which they have of the mind; and that good principles, with the same advantage of possession, will be as powerful to good purposes, though the mind discerns not the reason from whence they flow: to answer this end of religion, were the preachers of the gospel sent into the world; and the errand was worthy of him who sent them.

PART II.

The subject of the text re-considered; and the circumstance, that a few of the learned heathens extricated themselves from

popular errors, discovered a Supreme Being, and acquired clear notions of morality, shown to be no argument against the necessity of a revelation: for, in the first place, religion, if it be of any use at all, is of use equally to all men: since all men live under a sense of being accountable for their actions, all equally stand in need of directions to guide them: to show that reason served the purpose of four or five persons out of millions, is no proof that it rendered the publication of the gospel unnecessary: neither will the argument hold good—that what reason did for a few, it was capable of doing for all, and was therefore a sufficient foundation for true religion; inasmuch as true religion was lost, not from a defect in reason, but by the abuse and misapplication of it; for the general abuse of reason stood in need of a remedy, as an eye which, though sound, is covered with a film, requires this obstruction of the sight to be removed: moreover, when reason is considered abstractedly, as a principle of action, that degree of it which illuminates the minds of extraordinary men must not be taken as a measure of what is to direct the mass: yet among even the learned and philosophic sages of antiquity, few formed just notions of religion and morals; the people in general had neither time nor capacity to make the attempt: reasoning, in short, will not do for them; and therefore the gospel set out differently, by proposing the great truths of religion, plainly, simply, and authoritatively. The custom of dressing up the doctrines and proofs of religion in axioms, theorems, and demonstrations, may be useful to men of thought and contemplation, but not so to mankind in general: by this method religion would have lost that plainness of doctrine and simplicity of evidence which are strong proofs of its divine original. The foregoing observations are made on the supposition that a few wise and learned men had extricated themselves from all popular superstitions; but this has never been proved: indeed St. Paul justly lays it to the charge of the wise men of the world, *that when they*

knew God they glorified him not as God, &c. Socrates, the best of them, when accused of despising, and of teaching the Athenian youth to despise, the gods of his country, acknowleged himself an idolater in the court of Areopagus, and made his observance of sacrificial rites on the Pagan altars a part of his defence. But how different was the defence of St. Paul, accused in the same court and of the same crime, when he made his appeal to the ALTAR OF THE UNKNOWN GOD! The very death of Socrates shows that he did not dissemble his opinions through fear: was it then possible for any one to oppose heathen idolatry on his authority? Moreover, the character of Socrates, as well as of his accusers, was afterwards put in a true light; his memory was held in reverence; and his doctrines were published by his great and philosophic pupils; yet for the space of near four hundred years to the birth of Christ, what was the effect produced thereby on the morals of mankind? The manner and effect of St. Paul's preaching at Athens, and of other Apostles in various parts of the world, contrasted with those of Socrates and his school. Concluding observations:

I. If during so many ages reason was unable to reform the world, let us not be so vain as to imagine we could have done more in similar circumstances, &c.

II. When we consider the means used by God in restoring true religion, and pretend to judge of their fitness, let us avoid being misled by the conceit of some, who think themselves wise enough to give such directions in so momentous a matter, &c.

III. Since we see how unable human reason is to struggle against the inveterate follies of superstition, and also how much it is indebted to the light of the gospel, let us be careful to preserve this light, for fear of falling back again into the wretched state from which it delivered us, &c.

DISCOURSE IV.

I CORINTHIANS, CHAP. I.—VERSE 21.

For after that, in the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

PART I.

'IN the wisdom of God, the world by wisdom knew not God.' There is some difficulty in ascertaining the precise meaning of the first words, 'in the wisdom of God.' Some understand the meaning to be, that since the world, 'in the wisdom of God,' i. e. by contemplating the wisdom of God in the great works of the creation, had not 'by wisdom,' i. e. by the exercise of their reason, arrived to the true knowlege of God, it pleased God to take another method, and 'by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' But since this difficulty does not affect the main assertions of the Apostle in the text, I will not spend time in inquiring what has been, or may be, said on this point.

The main assertions of the Apostle in the text are two:

First, That the world by wisdom knew not God.

Secondly, That it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save believers.

The language made use of here by St. Paul may want explaining; for it may seem strange that the preaching of the gospel should by an Apostle of Christ be called 'the foolishness of preaching.' But the meaning and language of St. Paul will be accounted for by considering what led him to this kind of expression.

The doctrine of the cross, and of the redemption of the world by the death and passion of Christ, was received by the great

pretenders to wisdom and reason with scorn and contempt: 'The Greeks,' says the Apostle, 'seek after wisdom—and Christ crucified is to the Greeks foolishness.' The pride of learning and philosophy had so possessed the polite parts of the heathen world, that they could not submit to a method of salvation which was above the reach of their philosophy, and which refused to be tried by the disputes and subtilties of their schools. The Apostle, verse 17, says, 'Christ sent him to preach the gospel, not with the wisdom of words.' The wisdom of the world, thus discarded, took its revenge of the gospel, and called it 'the foolishness of preaching.' Be it so, says the Apostle; yet by this 'foolishness' of preaching God intends to save them who believe; for this method is of God, and not of man; 'and the foolishness of God is wiser than men.' You see what led St. Paul to use this expression, and to call the preaching of the gospel 'the foolishness of preaching.' The great and the learned so esteemed it, and so called it: the Apostle speaks to them in their own language, and calls on them in the text to compare their much-boasted wisdom with this foolishness of preaching, and to judge of them by their effects: the world by 'wisdom knew not God;' but the 'foolishness' of preaching is 'salvation' to every believer.

Whether this charge of ignorance imputed to the gentile world be true or no, is a matter depending on the evidence of history: if it be not true, there can be no difficulty in disproving it: the time and place may be named, when and where the true knowlege of God prevailed, and religion in its purity was professed by the people. But this has not been attempted, nor will it be, by any one who is acquainted with the history of the ancient world.

It may be hard perhaps to account for the general corruption of religion which prevailed in the world; especially when we consider how absolutely absurd, and contrary to common sense, many of the superstitious rites were, which had spread themselves over the heathen world. We can scarcely conceive what should move men to consecrate birds and beasts, stocks and stones, and to fall down and worship them. But these follies being once introduced, and propagated from father to son, it is easy to account for the great difficulty of removing

them. Custom and education, and the reverence which men naturally have for what they esteem to be religion, were foundations too strong to be removed by the reasoning and speculations of a few who were something wiser than the rest, and saw perhaps many and great absurdities in the common practice; and though there did appear in the heathen world some such great and good men, who were as lights shining in a dark place; yet was there not one found able to extricate himself from all the superstition of his country, much less to reduce the people to a practice consonant to the pure principles of natural religion. And it is an observation true in itself, and of great weight in this case, that not one country, nay, not one city, ever embraced the principles of pure natural religion on the strength of their own reason, or on conviction from the reason and wisdom of others. And since the world continued under idolatry for many ages together before the coming of Christ, notwithstanding that they had as much sense and reason in those days as we have in ours, what pretence is there to imagine that they would not have continued in the same state to this day, if the light of the gospel had not appeared?

Whoever considers this matter seriously and fairly, cannot but be convinced of the truth of the Apostle's assertion, that 'by wisdom the world knew not God.'

As to the second proposition, 'That it hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe;' as far as true notions of God and religion are necessary means of salvation, the truth of the assertion will be admitted.

The enemies of revelation will of themselves, and in spite of themselves, bear witness so far to this truth. They now see clearly the great truths of religion; they can now demonstrate the being and attributes of God, and from the relation we bear to him deduce the duties owing to him, the worship, and the purity of the worship, that is to be paid him. Are they wiser than all who lived before them? or do they owe this new degree of light and knowlege to some advantage which others before them had not? They will hardly say they are wiser than all who lived when learning and arts and sciences flourished in the East, in Greece, and at Rome; and should they say it, it will be harder still to believe them: and yet

what one advantage have they above the others, this only excepted, that in their days the light of the gospel has been spread over the world?

But, however, this comparison between the wise and learned of different ages will not determine the case before us; for religion is not made for scholars only: the use of it is to govern and direct the world, and to influence the practice of mankind. And the great question lies between the religion of the world in general before the coming of Christ, and since; and the influence which religion in one state and the other naturally had, or may be supposed to have had, by just consequence, on the morality of mankind. To give you an account of the religion and divinity of the vulgar in the days of heathenism, would be to entertain you with a history of folly and superstition; some parts of which for the barbarity of them, and some for the lewdness of them, are very unfit to be related in a Christian congregation. The people thought of their gods much after the rate that the poets write of them; and their sacred history was an account of the battles and quarrels, and of the loves and amours of their deities. Their practice in religion was agreeable to their articles of belief: their impure deities were worshipped in acts of impurity or barbarity: and how could it be otherwise? for when vice itself was consecrated, and had temples dedicated to it, how could the worshippers be untainted?

But consider now how the case stands in countries where the gospel is preached in any tolerable degree of purity. The common people now are no greater reasoners than they were formerly: yet go into our villages, you will find there a firm persuasion of the unity of God, who made heaven and earth, and all things in them: the meanest of the people will tell you that an honest heart is the only acceptable sacrifice to God, and that there is no way to please him but by doing justly and righteously.

Let me ask now, whence comes this change? Is it for the better or no? If it is, surely the world is greatly indebted to the hand that wrought this change, that rooted out all the false notions destructive of virtue and the happiness of mankind, and planted in the room thereof principles which do so

much honor and glory to God, and are full of present peace and future hopes for the children of men.

I am aware that it will be said that the common people now are no more able to give a reason of the faith that is in them, than their heatheni h ancestors were before them; and that custom and the prejudices of education have influenced both equally; and that these Christians, had they been born heathens, would have been heathens, or, if Mahometans, they would have been still Mahometans.

Suppose the case to be so, and consider whether we are not extremely obliged to revelation on this foot.

If men are naturally influenced by custom and the force of education to follow the opinions and practices of their country, and are, after all that has been said to exalt human reason, incapable to deliver themselves from popular and national errors by the strength of their own reason; two things must, I think, be admitted:

First, That it was a great undertaking, and the work of a very extraordinary power, to root out ancient errors, which had for many ages had possession of the whole world: And,

Secondly, That it was an act of great wisdom and goodness, as well as power, to introduce just principles and notions of religion, and by giving them at first a firm establishment, to throw the weight of custom and education on the side of virtue and true religion, in opposition to superstition and vice.

The first proposition cannot be disputed; for if the power of custom and education be as great as it is represented, the power must be very great that gets the better of it: and I believe it will be hard to show from history, that ever a nation was reasoned out of their religious errors: it has been done by the power of miracles, and by the power of the sword; but in this last method the nation and its errors have been commonly destroyed together. However, the gospel was not introduced by external force; and therefore the work must necessarily be ascribed to a power of another kind.

As to the second proposition, it may be thought dishonorable to true religion to suppose it to be at all beholden to custom and education for its support; dishonorable to God, to suppose that he can make use of any thing to propagate religion, but

the reason and understanding of his creatures; and, consequently, that true religion is no longer religion, when it stands by the force of custom and education.

I know how much has been said of the use of reason in religion, to the exclusion of all other helps: but I know too that the holy writers frequently call on us 'to train up a child in the way he should go,' and give this reason for it, 'that when he is old he will not depart from it.' I know too that God called Abraham, and made of him a great nation, 'because he knew him, that he would teach his children after him to keep the commandments of the Lord:' which precept to instruct children betimes, and which declaration on God's part in relation to Abraham, cannot stand with a supposition that true religion is the worse for the support it has from example and education.

But to consider this matter a little farther: if we know any thing with certainty of mankind, it is this; that their principles, opinions, and practices are strongly influenced by custom and education. I will ask any man whether he thinks it possible to alter this state of things, and to make all men as much philosophers, and as much above prejudices, as some pretend to be? I believe no man in his senses ever thought this possible. If then men are, and ever will be as long as they continue men, greatly governed by custom and education, the single question is, whether it was an act beneficent to mankind, and becoming the wisdom of God, to direct this influence to the side of virtue and true religion, in order to make men happy, rather than to leave them to be miserable under the strong influence to vice, superstition, and idolatry, which had possession of the world?

The true end of religion is to make men better, to lead them to a due discharge of their duty to God and to man. True principles and right and just notions of God will lead men to a just performance of their duty, independently of this consideration, whether their principles are the result of their own reasoning, or instilled into them by education. If this be so, the common people, whose religion is always treated as their prejudices, are as capable of performing the duties of religion, and as acceptably in the sight of God, as the greatest reasoners and philosophers.

Let us suppose that some wise man had fully convinced himself by reason of the being of God, of the holiness of his nature, and that he is a rewarder of all those who diligently seek him: suppose too, that a plain countryman, not able to make deductions in a course of reasoning, was yet fully persuaded of the same truths from his bible, or the instruction of his parish-priest: I say, in this case, that the countryman's principles are as good a foundation for all the duties and purposes of religion as the philosopher's; that they will be as beneficial to the world in making a good father, husband, or master, and as beneficial to the man in making him happy here and hereafter: and though his instruction, compared with the philosopher's deep knowlege, may, in the language of St. Paul, be called the 'foolishness of preaching,' yet will it, if duly attended to, 'make him wise unto salvation.'

I am not placing religion on prejudice as its proper foundation: no; the gospel was at first introduced by the strongest appeal to reason, when it was introduced by the hand of God in signs and wonders and mighty works, which the Apostle calls the 'demonstration of the Spirit,' and opposes it to the 'wisdom of the world:' and the gospel stands on the same reason still. But this is a reason which, the wise ones of the world think, can produce nothing but prejudice, or such faith as differs but little from it. This then I say, that it was worthy of God, by a strong hand and outstretched arm, in signs and wonders to beat down superstition and idolatry, and the corrupt notions of the world; and to plant in the room of them, not by the arts of man's wisdom, but by these demonstrations of the Spirit, true principles of reason and religion; to give them possession in the world, that they might be delivered down from generation to generation, and maintained under the natural influence which custom and education have, and always will have, on mankind.

And if we consider revelation in this light only, as removing false principles of error and superstition, and introducing just ones of truth and religion, independently of the reason and evidence on which the gospel stands, it must appear to be an act of divine love and goodness, which we ought to receive with thankfulness. If men were supposed to be quite inca-

pable of entering at all into the reason of things, and to be wholly guided by prejudice and custom, yet surely even then it would be an act of love to draw out of their minds principles full of mischief to themselves and others, and place in their room principles of love and benevolence to make themselves and others happy. And surely this at least must be allowed to the gospel, that it did in fact expel the false and pernicious notions of heathenism, and introduce principles on which men may be at peace and in friendship with God and with each other. And from hence perhaps we may see the reason why miracles were so frequent in the beginning of the gospel, and why they ceased afterwards. They were necessary till truth had possession of the world; but truth, thoroughly established, was left to be propagated by the natural means of instruction and education.

Every body sees what mischief and wickedness are often produced by false and corrupt opinions and principles; which owe not their strength to reason, for with reason they have no alliance, but to the possession they have of the mind. Good principles, with the same advantage of possession, will be as powerful to good purposes, though the mind discerns not the reason from whence they flow. There are but few workmen, perhaps, who know the reason, and can demonstrate the mechanic powers of the instruments they use; but being perfect in the use and application of these powers, they are able workmen and master-builders; which is all that is required of them. In like manner, if true religion is so introduced into the mind as to work in the heart of man, and make him upright and honest, the end and purpose of religion is answered.

To answer this end of religion were the preachers of the gospel sent into the world: the errand was worthy of him who sent them; whose goodness and mercy inclined him to teach men the way to happiness, but not to flatter their vanity and pride of knowlege. The doctrines of the gospel are not the worse for being 'foolishness to the Greeks, and a stumbling-block to the Jews;' since they are, and on experience appear to be, 'the power of God to salvation to all who believe.'

DISCOURSE IV.

PART II.

In treating on this subject, I have already observed to you that there are two propositions or assertions contained in the words of the text:

First, That 'the world by wisdom knew not God.'

Secondly, That it pleased God 'by the foolishness of preaching' to save believers.

It being allowed in general that the world was grossly ignorant and superstitious, and unacquainted with the true notion of God, and the religion that was to be paid him; yet it will still be said that there were some, some few at least, who had extricated themselves from these popular errors; who saw and acknowleged one Supreme Being, the cause of all things; who had clear and distinct notions of morality, and of the duties owing from man to man. The writings of some of these great men are still extant; and if we consult only Plato, Aristotle, and the Roman philosopher Tully, we may see how far reason and philosophy could and did carry these men in matters of religion and morality.

From these and such-like instances we are apt to form a general notion of the powers of human reason; and the argument appears undeniable: thus far human reason did go without the help of the gospel; thus far therefore it certainly can go.

It may be worth our while to consider this case, not with an intent to depreciate the worth of these, the best and greatest men of antiquity, but to state it clearly and fairly, as far as it does, or may be supposed to affect the argument for the necessity of revelation.

Supposing then, in the first place, all that is said of these wise men to be true, and that they did arrive at a clear and distinct knowlege of God, and of the religion that was due to him; yet it will weigh but little in the present consideration, for this plain reason; because religion, if it is of any use at all, is equally of use to all men: for since all men live under the

impression of natural conscience, and the sense of being accountable for their actions, they all equally want direction; and as the experience of the world shows, all men will have some religion, either good or bad. To say therefore that reason was sufficient for the purposes of religion before the publication of the gospel, and to prove it by showing that it served this purpose in four or five instances in an age, whilst millions and millions had no help from it, is quite mistaking the point: we want something to be of use to all men, and which all men stand in need of to their well-being: you have found something that will serve perhaps one in a million, and think that you have discovered an adequate supply for the general want. But what must become of the many thousands who are incapable of being the better for your method? If the whole nation were infected with the plague, it would be worth while to send even to the Indies for a man who could cure them; but if his remedy could cure only two or three in the kingdom, it would be of no great consequence whether he came or staid away.

But it may be said that what reason did for a few, it was capable of doing for all, if it had been duly attended to; and, consequently, that reason was a sufficient foundation for true religion, notwithstanding that true religion was lost in the world; which was not through a defect in reason, but through the abuse and misapplication of it by the generality of mankind.

I agree the case to be so; but we are still where we were before: for this general abuse of reason, or inattention to the voice of it, which had spread over the whole world, had certainly a root in some general evil and corruption that had infected mankind: and whatever reason was in itself, yet it stood in great want of a remedy for this evil, that had so universally darkened and obscured it. Suppose I should say such a man was blind; will it be a proper reply to say, No, his eyes are sound and good, excepting only that there is a very thick film over them, which intercepts all sight? or would it be proper to insist that the man wanted no cure, because he had sound eyes? What shall we do with this film then? for till it is removed, the man might as well be without eyes. This was the very case of the heathen world. You say they had

reason sufficient for all the purposes of religion: be it so; yet, in fact, it is certain they were never able to make this use of it for ages together. Since the coming of Christ the world has been able to make this use of their reason: and now, at last, it is become a great question whether a cure has been wrought or no.

But consider farther, when we talk of reason abstractedly as a principle of human actions, it is right to say that reason can do whatever we see any man perform by the help of his reason; and therefore it is true that reason can measure the magnitude and distances of the heavenly bodies: but is it also true that every man's reason can do this? by no means; and therefore to consider all men as capable of doing what we see some great geniuses able to do, is absolutely absurd. Now, the few whom you suppose to have attained to a just notion of God and of religion in the heathen world, what were they? Men brought up in retirement and study, of great industry and application, who spent their lives in searching into the causes of things: and even of those many who followed this method of life and study, there are but few who can with any pretence be said to have discovered the truth: the crowd of philosophers talked much more, but knew as little as the people. But the people themselves, what must become of them? they have no time for study, and they must have true notions of religion at a cheaper rate, or not at all. As religion is a thing in which all men are concerned, it must be conveyed in a manner that suits men of all conditions. Supposing therefore that you have found a way by which some few thoughtful men obtained true notions of religion, you are far from having found a way of propagating true religion in the world. Reasoning will not do the business: and therefore the gospel set out in another manner, by proposing the great truths of religion in the plainest and simplest manner in an authoritative way, but by an authority supported by the plainest and the strongest proof, the proof of miracles; an argument that was adapted to men of all conditions, and made its way to every understanding.

It is become a fashion to dress up the great doctrines and proofs of religion in axioms and theorems and demonstrations; and those who have taken pains in this way may have done

great service to men of thought and contemplation: but had the gospel set out at first with this air of mathematics, it had lost one strong proof of its divine original, arising from the plainness of its doctrine, and the simplicity of the evidence which was offered in its behalf; which made the gospel to be a proper tender to all mankind. All mankind are concerned in the great truths of religion; and nothing can be more absurd, and contradictory to the notion of God's wisdom and goodness, than to suppose God to intend to establish true religion in the world, and yet to offer it in a method which could possibly have an influence but on very few. Whoever will reflect seriously on the nature and condition of mankind in general, will be able to give himself a clear reason why God did not call in the assistance of the 'wisdom of the world' to propagate the gospel, but chose rather to establish it by the 'foolishness of preaching,' as it is called, and by the 'demonstration of the Spirit,' manifested in signs and wonders and mighty works.

I have hitherto considered this plea, drawn from the case of some great men in the heathen world, on supposition that what is said of them is true, and that they had indeed extricated themselves from the superstitions of their country, and attained just notions of true religion: but this thing, which has been often said, has never been proved, and I am afraid never will.

I do not wonder that those who have been conversant in the writings of the ancients, and have been entertained with the just and fine reflections to be met with on the attributes of God, considered as Maker and Governor of the world, and of mankind in particular, should conclude that those who thought and talked so clearly of the great attributes of the Deity, and of his providence over the world, had also as clear notions of the religious service due to him, and to him only. What has led to this conclusion I conceive to be this: there is so plain a connexion between the relation we bear to God, and the religious duty owing to him, and the argument is so familiar to us, that we almost naturally suppose that every man who maintains the principle, cannot fail of seeing the conclusion.

The conclusion indeed is so natural, that, if it were overlooked, nothing can more sensibly prove the weakness of hu-

man reason in opposition to inveterate errors and superstition; and nothing can more effectually show us how unable these wise men were to reform the world, since with all their wisdom they were not able to reform themselves. Yet this was the truth of the case; and it was not at random, and without knowlege of the fact, that St. Paul lays this to the charge of the wise men of the world, 'that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools; and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things.'

To prove the truth of the Apostle's assertion, that even the wise men, who 'knew God, did not glorify him as God,' by an induction of particulars, would be undertaking a work which could hardly be well discharged in this place. But yet the point is too material to be passed over in silence. Let us then consider the case of one only, but of one, who among the good men was the best, and among the wise ones the wisest. I shall easily be understood to mean Socrates, the great philosopher of Athens: and were the wise men of antiquity to plead their cause in common, they could not put their defence into better hands.

We have an account of the speculative opinions of many of the wise men of Greece preserved to us in authors of great credit; but of their practice and personal behavior in life little is said: which makes it hard to judge how far their own practice and conduct was influenced by their opinions, or how consistent they were in pursuing the consequences of their own doctrines. The case might have been the same with Socrates, had not a very particular circumstance put him under a necessity of explaining his conduct and practice with respect to the religion of his country. He had talked so freely of the heathen deities, and the ridiculous stories told of them, that he fell under a suspicion of despising the gods of his country, and of teaching the youth of Athens to despise their altars and their worship. On this accusation he is summoned before the great court of

the Areopagites; and happily the apology he made for himself is preserved to us by two of the ablest of his scholars, and the best writers of antiquity, Plato and Xenophon: and from both their accounts it appears that Socrates maintained and asserted before his judges that he worshipped the gods of his country, and that he sacrificed in private and in public on the allowed altars, and according to the rites and customs of the city. After this public confession, so authentically reported by two so able hands, there can be no doubt of his case. He was an idolater, and had not, by his great knowlege and ability in reasoning, delivered himself from the practice of the superstition of his country. You see how far the wisdom of the world could go: give me leave to show you what the foolishness of preaching could do in the very same case.

St. Paul was in the same case: he was accused in the same city of Athens of the same crime, that he was a setter-forth of strange gods; and before the same great court of Areopagites he made his apology, which is likewise preserved to us by St. Luke in the seventeenth chapter of the Acts. We have then the greatest and the ablest among the wise men of Greece, and an Apostle of Christ, in the same circumstances. You have heard the philosopher's defence, that he worshipped the gods of his country, and as his country worshipped them. Hear now the Apostle: 'Ye men of Athens,' says he, 'I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious: for as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you: God that made the world, and all things therein. This God,' he tells them, 'is not worshipped with men's hands, as though he needeth any thing:—Nor was the godhead like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.' He then calls on them, in the name of this great God, to repent of their superstition and idolatry, which God would no longer bear: 'because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.'

Which of these two now was a preacher of true religion? Let those who value human reason at the highest rate determine the point.

The manner in which Socrates died was the calmest and the bravest in the world, and excludes all pretension to say that he dissembled his opinion and practice before his judges out of any fear or meanness of spirit; vices with which he was never taxed, and of which he seems to have been incapable.

Consider then, was it possible for any man, on the authority of Socrates, to open his mouth against the idolatry of the heathen world, or to make use of his name to that purpose, who had so solemnly, in the face of his country, and before the greatest judicature of Greece, borne testimony to the gods of his country, and the worship paid them?

But to proceed: the city of Athens soon grew sensible of the injury done to the best and wisest of their citizens, and of their own great mistake in putting Socrates to death. His accusers and his judges became infamous; and the people grew extravagant in doing honors to the memory of the innocent sufferer: they erected a statue, nay, a temple, to his memory; and his name was had in honor and reverence. His doctrines on the subjects of divinity and morality were introduced into the world with all the advantage that the ablest and politest pens could give; and they became the study and entertainment of all the considerable men who lived after him. It is worth observing too, that from the death of Socrates to the birth of Christ were, if I remember right, near four hundred years; which was time sufficient to make the experiment, how far the wisdom of Socrates, attended with all the advantages before-mentioned, could go in reforming the world. And what was the effect of all this? Can you name the place where religion was reformed? Can you name the man who was so far reformed, as to renounce the superstition of his country? No: none such are to be found; and how should there? since the greater the credit and reputation of Socrates were, the more strongly did they draw men to imitate his example, and to worship as their country worshipped.

Consider, on the other side, what was the consequence of preaching the gospel. St. Paul entertained the Athenians with

no fine speculations; but he laid before them, in the plainest dress, the great and momentous truths of religion; he openly rebuked their idolatry, and condemned their superstition. The gospel was published in the same manner every where. The first preachers of it were enabled to support it by miracles; and most of them shed their blood in defence of its truth. By these means they came likewise to have credit and authority in the world. But in these two cases there was this great difference: the corrupt example of Socrates was a dead weight on the purity of his doctrine, and tended to perpetuate superstition in the world; the authority and example of the Apostles went hand in hand, and united their force to root out idolatry. There was this farther difference too: the doctrines of Socrates could go only among the learned: the doctrines of the gospel were artless and plain, and suited to every man's capacity.

For near four hundred years the disciples of Socrates had the world to themselves, to reform it if they could; in all which time there is no evidence remaining that the religion of the world was the better for their wisdom. But in much less time the gospel prevailed in most parts of the known world: wherever it came, superstition and idolatry fled before it: and in little more than three centuries the empire became Christian; which completed the victory over the heathen deities. And if we may judge by this comparison between the wisest of the heathens and an Apostle of Christ, the doctrine of the text will be fully verified; 'that the world by wisdom knew not God, and that God by the foolishness of preaching has provided salvation for them who believe.'

I have gone through the principal points which the text led me to consider, and shall add but few words by way of reflection on the whole.

If then it appears from history, and the experience of the world before us, that men for ages together lived in ignorance of the true God and of true religion, and that reason was not able to contend against inveterate errors and superstitions; let us not be so vain as to imagine that we could have done more in the same circumstances, than all or any who lived in the many ages of idolatry. If we consider to what height arts and sciences were carried in those days, and the politeness of Greece and

Rome in all parts of learning, we shall have little reason to imagine that men have grown wiser as the world has grown older. If we have more reason in matters of religion, and undoubtedly we have more, it should lead us to consider to whom we are indebted for the happy change, and to give praise to him who set the reason of mankind free from the chains under which it had been fast bound for ages together by superstition and idolatry.

When we consider the means made use of by God for restoring true religion in the world, and pretend to judge of the fitness of them to attain the end proposed, we should be aware of being misled by the conceits of some who think themselves wise enough to give directions in a matter of so great moment. Some may imagine it might be better, if the gospel had reasoned more philosophically on the nature of the Deity, or more fully explained the nature of the human soul; and others may wish that other abstruse points of reason and divinity had been cleared to their satisfaction. But this was not the errand Christ came on: he came to teach true religion, and to teach it to all men; and therefore what was not fit for all was no part of his business. The Greeks sought after wisdom, and the Jews required a sign; but the preachers of the gospel had no commission to satisfy the curiosity of one or of the other; but to teach the doctrines of God in such a manner, and to prove them by such means, as might influence and affect as well the lowest as the highest. If then the means made use of to introduce the gospel into the world were such as were proper and necessary to subdue ancient errors and prejudices; if the truths taught by Christ are a proper foundation for all the duties of religion in which man can have any concern; if they are left to be supported in the world, and propagated from age to age, by methods which by experience have been found effectual, and which, human nature considered, must be effectual to preserve the profession of religion amongst men: if, I say, we discover these marks in the gospel, we see enough to convince us that the gospel is the power of God and the wisdom of God unto salvation; which is seeing all that we are concerned to look after, or have any pretence to expect from him who came to save and to redeem us.

Lastly, Since we have the experience of many ages before us

to show us how unable human reason is to struggle against the errors and follies of superstition, when once they have got possession; since from our own experience we know how much reason is indebted to the light of the gospel; we should be careful to preserve this light, for fear of falling back again into the wretched state from which we have been delivered, or into a worse. Reason was once, what the light of the gospel is now, a sufficient guide in religion: but when men grew corrupt and vain in their imaginations, superstition and error prevailed over the world, and false religion led reason in triumph for ages together. As reason was subdued, the light of the gospel may be; and will be, when the same causes meet to work together: a consideration that should make men who have any sense of religion, think seriously of the treatment the gospel every day meets with. If we use it no better, it may soon leave us; and when once we get rid of this foolishness of preaching, we know by sad experience what is to be expected from the wisdom of the world.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE V.

JOHN, CHAP. III.—VERSE 16.

WHATEVER difficulties men find in the gospel, we might suppose it would be admitted at least to be a good representation of God's mercy towards mankind. Yet there are some who think that Nature holds out better hopes to her children, in teaching them that the infirmities of humanity are unavoidable, and the mercy of God infinite; whence they conceive all promises of mercy to be unnecessary, and therefore liable to suspicion: and this is made an argument against revelation, past or to come. The credit and authority of revelation are much strengthened by its being reconciled to the natural hopes and expectations of mankind. The answers of a Christian and a Deist when asked the grounds of their respective hopes and expectations, shown nearly to coincide. The gospel is no enemy to the hopes of nature; but the question is, whether these give such security of pardon and immortality as will justify us in rejecting the light of revelation. Whoever depends on God's forgiveness, admits himself to be a sinner: upon this admission three considerations laid down:—I. that natural religion could not be originally founded in the consideration of man's being a sinner, and in expectation of pardon: II. that the hopes which we are able to form in our present circumstances, are too imperfect to give us intire satisfaction: III. that the coming of Christ has supplied these defects, perfecting and completing the hopes of nature.

The original religion of nature was agreeable to the original

state of nature; consequently, if natural religion be founded in the consideration of man's sin and wickedness, it follows that man was originally formed sinful and weak: supposing men originally to be what we see they are, on what grounds are we to hope for an alteration for the better? for if it was consistent with God's goodness to put men into this state originally, it is not inconsistent with his goodness to continue them in it: hence mere reason cannot entertain hopes of being delivered from the present state of the world. Even allowing that such an order of things removed all responsibility from our actions, yet no religion could be built on it: though we might escape punishment, we could never show any plea for being put into a better state. Farther, as natural religion is only obedience to the laws of nature; if natural religion be considered as nothing else from the beginning but an expectation of pardon for sin, God must have made laws only that his subjects might break them, and he himself show his goodness in pardoning their transgressions; which is absurd.

In a view of the second consideration, two things may be affirmed of the present state of mankind; one is, that they have a sense of their obligation to obey the laws of reason and nature; the other is, that very few do tolerably, and some perfectly, pay this obedience: it is impossible, therefore, to found the hopes of religion on innocence and obedience; for obedience is not paid: impunity cannot be claimed for all sins; much less any degree of happiness, present or future, in behalf of offenders: we have nothing but the probability of God's mercy accepting imperfect endeavors and attainments: but what security can arise out of this? Since all our natural powers are the gift of God, and our best services but a debt, the claims of natural religion are only those of unprofitable servants, to whom nothing can be due.

With respect to the third consideration, in viewing the conditions and promises of the gospel, what reason have we to be offended? The laws which are made the conditions of happi-

ness are not new impositions, but as old as reason itself, and the same which natural religion stands bound to obey. In this point we are no losers; but in all other respects we are gainers. Those hopes, which we could not have from innocence, the gospel offers to us through the mercy of God: nature had no refuge, after sin, but in repentance; yet nature could not tell us the efficacy of that repentance, which is disclosed only by the gospel; all the hopes of nature beyond the grave, that land of doubt and uncertainty, are confirmed by the gospel, which has abolished death, and redeemed us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. Its promises extend to more than nature could ever claim; they take in all her wishes; establish all her hopes; and they are offered by a hand that is able to make them good. Conclusion: the reason we have to adore the goodness of God in these transactions.

DISCOURSE V.

JOHN, CHAP. III.—VERSE 16.

God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

In this passage of Scripture, and in many others, the redemption of the world by Christ Jesus is ascribed to the love and goodness of God towards mankind. Whatever other difficulties men may find in the gospel, one would suppose that it might be admitted to be, at least, a good representation of the divine mercy towards mankind, and fully to display that tenderness and compassion to our weakness and infirmities, which we all hope for, and with some reason expect to receive, from our great Creator, whose 'mercy is over all his works.'

The case being so, who would expect to hear any objection against the gospel derived from the topics of divine mercy and goodness? Yet some there are, who think the mercy of the gospel to be imperfect, and that nature gives far better hopes to all her children. They conceive the infirmities of human nature to be unavoidable, and the mercy of God to be infinite; and from these considerations they raise hopes as unbounded as they conceive the mercy to be. As they derive these strong assurances from natural reason, they conceive all promises of mercy to be unnecessary, and therefore to be suspected; and the argument is worked up not only to be an objection against the gospel revelation, but against all revelations, either past or to come.

There is nothing of more consequence to the credit and authority of revelation, than to reconcile it to the natural notions and the natural hopes and expectations of mankind;

and indeed the promises of the gospel and the hopes of nature are founded on the same common principles. Ask a Christian, why did God redeem mankind by sending his Son into the world? He must answer, because men were sinners, weak, and miserable, and unable to rescue themselves from their wretched condition. Ask him, what moved God to express so much concern for such worthless objects? He must resolve it into the goodness, and tenderness, and paternal affection of God, with which he embraces all the sons of men.

Ask the deist, on what grounds he has hope and confidence towards God? He will reply, that he conceives it impossible for a beneficent being to be rigorous and severe towards the crimes and follies of such weak, foolish, and impotent creatures, as men: that their iniquities, though against the light of nature, yet flow from a defect in the powers of nature; since it is no man's fault that he is not stronger, or wiser, or better, than he was made to be; and therefore, though the light of reason renders him accountable for his actions, yet his want of power to do what his reason approves, will make his defects excusable in the sight of his equitable Judge.

You see how nearly natural religion and the gospel are allied in the foundation of their hopes and expectations. It is pity such near friends, who have one common interest, should have any disputes. But disputes there are.

Far be it from us to weaken the hopes of nature. The gospel is no enemy to these hopes; so far otherwise, that all the hopes and expectations of nature are so many preparations to the gospel of Christ, and lead us to embrace that mercy offered by Christ, which nature so long and so earnestly has sought after.

But the question is, whether these natural hopes can give us such security of pardon, and of life and immortality, as will justify us in rejecting the light of revelation? Now, whoever depends on the forgiveness of God, admits himself to be in a case that wants pardon; that is, admits himself to be a sinner. This being the case of mankind in general, let it be considered,

First, That natural religion could not be originally founded

in the consideration of man's being a sinner, and in the expectation of pardon.

Secondly, That the hopes which we are able to form in our present circumstances, are too weak and imperfect to give us intire satisfaction.

Thirdly, That the coming of Christ has supplied these defects, and has perfected and completed the hopes of nature.

It must be allowed that the original religion of nature was agreeable to the original state of nature; and consequently, if natural religion is founded in the consideration of man's sin and weakness, it follows that man was originally formed a sinner and weak. But farther,

Supposing men made originally to be what we see they are, on what grounds are we to hope for an alteration for the better? For if it was consistent with God's goodness to put men into this state originally, how is it inconsistent with his goodness to continue that state, which was at first his own appointment? He could no more act inconsistently with his goodness at the beginning of the world, than he can at the end of it. If reason therefore admits the present state of the world to be of God's appointment, it must never afterwards pretend to entertain hopes of being delivered from it; and without such hopes all religion is vain and useless.

It may be thought perhaps, that, supposing the present state of things to be of God's appointment, we cannot be answerable for what we do; for why should he blame us for doing the work he has appointed? Allow this reasoning; yet no religion can be built on it; for it can go no farther than to say that we ought not to be punished for our doings; it can never show that we have any title to be put into a better state: the utmost it can pretend to prove, is, that we are absolutely unaccountable; and, if so, there is nothing we can do to less purpose than to trouble our heads about religion.

Farther, if the laws of nature are the precepts of natural religion, as without all doubt they are, it follows that natural religion can be nothing else but obedience to the laws of nature; and, consequently, the genuine hopes of natural religion must be founded in obedience. This must necessarily be

the case; for all laws are made to be obeyed. No prince was ever so absurd as to make laws with this view, that his subjects might break them, and he show his goodness in pardoning their transgressions: and yet this must have been the scheme of Providence, if natural religion was nothing else from the beginning but an expectation of pardon for sin.

Secondly, Let us take a view of our present state, without inquiring whether any and what change has happened to put us into this condition; and let us consider what may be expected from our present circumstances. Two things may be affirmed with certainty of the present condition of mankind: one is, that they have a sense of their obligation to obey the laws of reason and nature; which is evident from the force of natural conscience: the other is, that very few do in any tolerable degree, and none perfectly, pay this obedience.

Let us examine then how religion will stand on these circumstances. It is impossible to found the hopes of religion on innocence and obedience; for obedience is not paid. On the other hand, absolute impunity cannot be claimed for all sins; much less can any degree of happiness, either present or future, be claimed in behalf of offenders. The utmost probability to which human reason can arrive in this case is, that the goodness of God and the weakness of man considered, God may favorably accept our endeavors, how imperfect soever our attainments may be. But is this reasoning built on infallible principles? Can any certainty or security arise out of this? any that can give rest or peace to the mind of man, ever inquisitive after futurity? Will you promise impunity to offenders on repentance? Impunity, mere impunity, is not the thing that nature seeks after: she craves something more. But can the argument from the divine mercy be carried farther? Is it not great mercy to pardon sinners? Can you with decency desire a reward for them? Our Saviour has told us, that when we have done our best, we must still own 'that we are unprofitable servants;' and if we reflect that all our natural powers are the gift of God, and, consequently, our best services are but a debt paid to the donor; if we consider that in all we do there is no profit to the Most High; that his power and majesty are not exalted by our service, nor lessened by our

neglect; we shall find that our own reason teaches us the same lesson, and that, when we confess ourselves unprofitable servants, we give greater evidence of our understanding than of our humility. And if this be truly the case, what are the claims of natural religion? are they not the claims of unprofitable servants? the claims of those to whom nothing is due?

Thirdly, Let us now take a view of the conditions and promises of the gospel, and see whether we have any reason to be offended at them. As to the laws which are made the conditions of our happiness, they are not new impositions, but as old as reason itself, and the very same which natural religion stands bound to obey. Here then can be no complaint, at least no just one. So far then we are quite safe, that we can be no losers by the gospel, since it lays no new burden on us. In all other respects our case is extremely altered for the better. We feel ourselves easily tempted to do wrong, and unable to pay the obedience we owe to righteousness. Hopes, therefore, from our innocence we have none, but are forced to have recourse to the mercy of God. Now this mercy, which we hope for, the gospel offers us in the name of God. Have we any reason to suspect the offer? or to reject that very mercy, when promised by God, which our own reason teaches us to expect at his hands?

If we sin, nature has no refuge but in repentance; and how far that will go, we know not: nature has not, cannot teach us this knowlege. From the gospel we learn that true repentance shall never be in vain; shall not only protect us from punishment, but shall also set open to us the doors of life and immortality. There you may view religion once more restored to its native hope of glory and life for evermore. You will be no longer obliged to wander in the mazes and intricacies of human reason, and to speculate on the attributes of divine mercy and justice; the limits and boundaries of which are not to be determined by the wit of man, and the contemplation of which abounds with terrors as well as hopes: but you may see the clear and immutable purpose of God to give salvation to all who, with penitent hearts and a firm reliance on his word, endeavor after righteousness.

One would imagine the gospel should easily find credit with

men, when all its promises do so exactly tally and correspond with the hopes of nature. Has nature any reason to complain of this? Is it an objection to the gospel that it has confirmed all your hopes and expectations, that it has given you the security of God's promise to establish the very wishes of your heart? You trust, you say, that he who made you still retains some love for you: to convince you that he does, 'he hath sent his well-beloved Son into the world to save sinners.' Though you offend, yet you hope on repentance to be forgiven: the gospel confirms this hope; the terms of it are more beneficial, and convey to true penitents not only hope, but a claim to pardon. But pardon only will not satisfy; there is still something farther that Nature craves, something which with unutterable groans she pants after, even life and happiness for evermore. She sees all her children go down to the grave: all beyond the grave is to her one wide waste, a land of doubt and uncertainty: when she looks into it, she has her hopes, and she has her fears; and agitated by the vicissitude of these passions, she finds no ground whereon to rest her foot. How different is the scene which the gospel opens! There we see the heavenly Canaan, the new Jerusalem; in which city of the great God there are mansions, many mansions, for receiving them, 'who through faith, and patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and immortality.' Our blessed Master has abolished death, and redeemed us into the glorious liberty of the sons of God, that we may dwell in his presence as long as time itself shall last.

If we were to form a system of religion for ourselves that should answer to all our wishes and desires, what more could we ask for ourselves than what the gospel has offered? The obedience required of us is the same to which we are antecedently bound, in virtue of that reason and understanding which make us to be men. The promises of the gospel extend to more than nature could ever claim; they take in all her wishes, establish all her hopes; and they are offered by a hand that is able to make them good.

The conclusion of the whole is, that, since the religion of a sinner must necessarily be founded in the hopes of mercy; since these hopes have at best but uncertain foundation in

natural religion, and are liable to be disturbed and shaken by frequent doubts and misgivings of mind; we have great reason to bless and adore the goodness of God, who has openly displayed before our eyes the love that he has for the children of men, by sending 'his well-beloved Son into the world, that all who believe in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE VI.

II TIMOTHY, CHAP. I.—VERSE 10.

SOME maintain that the words of this text exclude all arguments for a future state of immortality, drawn either from the light of reason and nature, or from the writings of Moses. Thus far indeed they reason justly, that, if the text is to be understood in this exclusive sense, the authority of any former revelation will be affected equally with that of sense and reason: but the converse of this will hold good; the words of our Saviour (Luke xx. 37.), *Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush,* indicate that the text does not impeach the authority of Moses, nor consequently exclude the proofs of natural religion. It remains therefore to explain the literal meaning of the text, in which the word φωτίζειν has been improperly translated: its true signification is, *to enlighten, illustrate,* or *clear up* any thing; as it is used John i. 3. The real meaning therefore of our Saviour is, that the gospel has given a more full and sure proof of a future life and immortality than either the law of nature, or that of Moses. This view of the text leaves us at full liberty to consider the evidence which mankind had for those doctrines, as well as that which the gospel now affords; to show in what the former failed, and how it is supplied by the latter.

Natural evidence not to be estimated so much from the acuteness of this or that writer, as from the common sense and apprehension of mankind: it owes its authority, not to the abstract reasonings of any school, but to some general sense and notion found in all men, or to some common and uncontroverted maxim of reason. The argument therefore of unbelievers, drawn from

the inconsistencies of Plato, Aristotle, or Tully, is not available against the united voice of all mankind. The common belief and persuasion of mankind shown to be the foundation of all inquiry into this natural evidence of immortality; inquiry did not lead men originally to the train of evidence. The belief and persuasion of a future life would arise from the common sense that men have of good and evil, and their natural apprehension of accountableness attached to their actions, of which account is not taken in this world. Such an internal, heartfelt argument as this, has greater weight than all the reasonings of philosophy. Error of those explained who imagine that the notion of a future life originated in the descriptions of poets. We might as soon suppose that eating and drinking had the same origin, and that men would never have thought of it but for the fine entertainments described by such writers. The poets corrupted the genuine sentiments of nature by the wild conceits of folly and superstition; but still the root was natural, though the fruit was strange. Moreover an expectation of rewards and punishments prevailed where the fables of Greece never came. Belief of immortality, then, originated neither with poets nor philosophers, though both parties finding it a common principle among mankind, built their theories on this foundation. How far any of these inquirers succeeded in their attempts, is another question: natural evidence is prior to their investigations. Infidelity in fact is coeval with and caused by philosophy: doubts did not arise till men began to search for physical reasons for the soul's immortality: the subject enlarged on: speculations of ancient philosophers: the opinions of Plato and Cicero opposed to the doctrine of the corporealists: this brought the controversy to turn on the nature of the soul; and the belief of immortality either prevailed or declined, according as men conceived of the soul's natural dignity and power: hence we may judge of the difficulties attending the cause of immortality on the footing of natural religion: these difficulties enlarged on: another also remains, that no notion of immorta-

lity, as regards the soul unconnected with the body, can serve the end of religion, because it is one which the generality of mankind never can arrive at: abstract metaphysical notions are above the comprehension of the vulgar. Herein nature seems deficient and unable to support the hopes of immortality which she gives to her children: the expectation of the vulgar that they shall live again and be just the same flesh and blood, is justified by no principles of reason or nature; whilst the philosophic idea that the intellectual soul shall be the whole man, is not the common sense of nature, and therefore no part of natural religion. Inquiry how nature comes to be defective on so material a point: sacred history alone clears up the fact: immortality was the original condition of the creation, and death came by surprise on nature: on the original plan of nature, the common notion of immortality was the true one; for take death out of the question, which is the only separation of body and soul we know of, and there is no pretence for distinguishing between the man and the intellectual mind. The vulgar retained the true original notion of nature; but when the original state of nature was lost, the notion grew absurd; and thus the coming in of death obscured the hopes of immortality.

If we consider how our Saviour has enlightened this doctrine, it will appear that he has removed the difficulty at which nature stumbled. As death was no part of the state of nature, so the difficulties arising from it were not provided for in the religion of nature: to remove these was the proper work of revelation, which Christ has done by his gospel; for this shows us that the body and spirit may, and shall be, re-united before his judgment seat: this is stated in the words preceding the text: now if the abolishing of death was the bringing to light life and immortality, the coming in of death must have been that which so darkened nature. Conclusion: two things, as we learn from our Saviour's answer to the Sadducees (Mat. xxii. 29.), necessary to confirm us in the belief of a resurrection; viz., knowlege of the power of God, and of the will of God.

DISCOURSE VI.

II TIMOTHY, CHAP.—I. VERSE 10.

—And hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

THESE words being spoken of our blessed Saviour, and affirming that he through the gospel brought life and immortality to light, are thought by some to be exclusive of all arguments for a future immortality, drawn either from the light of reason and nature, or from the writings of Moses: for if the hopes of immortality were so supported before the coming of Christ Jesus, it could not be truly asserted of him, 'that he brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' And so far at least they must be allowed to argue justly, that, if the text is to be understood in this exclusive sense, it will affect the proofs and authorities of any former revelation equally with those of sense and reason. But then, on the other side, it is certain that, if this argument does not impeach the authority of Moses with regard to this fundamental article of faith, neither will it shut out the proofs of natural religion; since it must destroy the evidence of both or of neither. Now, that it does not set aside the authority of Moses, is evident from our Saviour's argument to the Sadducees: 'Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob:' Luke xx. 37. From whence it appears that our Saviour thought the law of Moses afforded good proof of a future life; which is inconsistent with the supposition that there was no evidence for life and immortality till the publication of the gospel.

But, supposing Moses or the law of nature to afford evidence for a future life and immortality, it remains to be considered in what sense the words of the text are to be understood, which do

affirm 'that life and immortality were brought to light through the gospel.' To bring any thing to light may signify, according to the idiom of the English tongue, to discover or reveal a thing which was perfectly unknown before: but the word in the original is so far from countenancing, that it will hardly admit of this sense. The Greek runs thus: φωτίσαντος δὲ ζωὴν καὶ ἀφθαρσίαν. Now φωτίζειν signifies (not to bring to light, but) to enlighten, illustrate, or clear up any thing. You may judge by the use of the word in other places: it is used in John i. 9. 'That was the true light, which lighteth (or enlighteneth) every man that cometh into the world:' ὃ φωτίζει πάντα ἄνθρωπον. Jesus Christ did not by coming into the world bring men to light; but he did by the gospel enlighten men, and make those who were dark and ignorant before, wise even to salvation. In like manner our Lord did enlighten the doctrine of life and immortality, not by giving the first or only notice of it, but by clearing up the doubts and difficulties under which it labored, and giving a better evidence for the truth and certainty of it, than nature or any revelation before had done. There is one place more, where our translators render the original word as they have done in the text: 1 Cor. iv. 5. 'Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall every man have praise of God.' But in this place it had been more properly rendered, 'who will cast light on' the hidden things of darkness; and so rendered, it better suits what follows, and 'will make manifest' the counsels of the heart. The hidden things of darkness, which shall be brought to light at the coming of the Lord, are the actions and practices of wicked men; which, though they are of a certain and determinate nature, are yet hard to judge of, because we cannot discern the springs and motives from whence they arise: perfectly unknown to us they are not; if they were, there was no occasion for the Apostle to forbid us judging of them; for men do not, cannot judge at all of things which do not at all fall under their notice: but they are so dark and obscure, that it is hard to judge rightly of them; and therefore it is but prudent to suspend our sentence till the day comes which will make all things

clear, which will hold such a light to these hidden things of darkness, that we shall manifestly discern them, and be able to view them on every side. So that, in this case, the hidden things of darkness are not supposed to be perfectly unknown, but only to be so dark and involved, that we cannot safely pass our judgment on them; and 'to bring them to light' imports no more than to set them in a clear light, and to make them plain and manifest to the eyes of all the world. According to the use then of the original word, 'to bring life and immortality to light' signifies to illustrate and make plain this great doctrine of religion, to dispel the doubts and uncertainties in which it was involved, and to give evident proof and demonstration to the world of the certainty of a future life and immortality.

The text, thus explained, leaves us at liberty to make the best both of the evidence of nature and of Moses for a future life and immortality, and asserts nothing to the gospel but this prerogative, that it has given a surer and fuller proof of this fundamental article than ever the world before was acquainted with. The true point then now before us, and which takes in the whole view of the text, is, to consider the evidence which mankind had for the doctrine of immortality before the coming of Christ, and the evidence which the gospel now affords; and to show where the former evidence failed, and how it is supplied by the latter.

It would take up too much time to examine minutely the several arguments for the immortality of the soul, which are to be found in the writings of heathen authors; nor would it perhaps answer the purpose of our present inquiry: for the natural evidence in this case is not so much to be estimated by the acuteness of this or that writer, as by the common sense and apprehension of mankind: and this, and all other opinions which have any pretension to derive themselves from nature, owe their authority, not to the abstracted reasonings of any school, but to some general sense and notion which is found in all men, or to some common and uncontroverted maxim of reason. The unbelievers of this age have abused their time and pains in their endeavors to expose the natural evidence of immortality, by confronting the different sentiments of the ancient philosophers, and by showing their uncertainty and in-

consistency: for what if Plato, if Aristotle, if Tully, are inconsistent with one another, or with themselves, in their abstracted arguings on this point? What is this to the evidence of nature, which is not the single opinion of Plato, or any other philosopher, but the united voice of all mankind? This was the common belief of the world, derived from some common sense, or principle of reason, before any philosopher had so much as thought of an abstracted reason for the proof of it: and had not the common sense of nature dictated this truth to them, I am very confident the philosophical reasons had never been thought of. That the common belief and persuasion was the foundation of the philosophical inquiry, is evident from hence, that all the ancient writers on this subject appeal to the common notion and consent of mankind, as one great argument for the truth of the doctrine: which certainly proves this at least, that the world was possessed of this belief long before they were writers, or ever the philosophical reasons were thought of. If the notion was common, that alone is a sufficient proof that it did not arise from abstracted reasoning; for no common opinion ever did or ever can: and the reason is plain; for a common opinion is that which is received by the generality of men, who never were, who never will be, capable of attending to abstracted reason. Now this natural evidence, distinguished from the intricacies of philosophy, is the thing which we inquire after, and which will stand its ground, whatever becomes of the private notions of learned men; for nature may be in the right in giving notice of a future life, however men may be mistaken, when they come to consider and ascertain the nature and cause of it; which to do is the mark and aim of philosophy.

But the common consent is the voice and law of nature; for what all agree in must needs derive itself from something that is common to all; and what is so, but the sense and instinct of nature? When men come to speculation, they differ as much in the cast and turn of their minds, as they do in the features and lineaments of their faces; and therefore speculative reasoning will never produce a common persuasion.

This belief and persuasion of the certainty of a future life arose from the common sense that men have of the difference of

good and evil, and of every man's being accountable for the things done in this world; which account not being taken in this world, as the least degree of observation will enable men to see, they concluded, or rather they felt from the very force of reason and conscience, that there was an account to be given hereafter. Such an internal argument as this, which springs up in the heart and from the heart of every man, has a greater weight in it than all the reasonings of philosophy put together, and will tie men down, if not to hope for, yet at least to fear a future immortality; either of which is the silent voice of nature testifying the reality of a life to come.

That this is the true foundation of the universal belief of a future life, may be learnt from hence, that the persuasion of another life was always connected with the supposition that there were different states for good and bad men; so that you cannot any where trace the notion of immortality, but you find evidence also for the different conditions of men in another life, according as they have behaved themselves in this. Now these two opinions being thus inseparably united, it is easy to judge which is the natural sense, and which the consequence: let any man try, and he will find that it is not the expectation of living that makes men infer the reasonableness or necessity of a judgment; but it is the reasonable and natural expectation of judgment, which makes them infer the necessity and reality of a future life.

Into what great absurdities this natural notion grew under the management of poets is well known: they named the princes and the judges, and described the tortures of the wicked, as their fancies led them; and their inventions became the vulgar theology. But this still shows the truth of what I have asserted; for neither would the poets, whose business it is to raise fine scenes on the plan and probability of nature, have so painted the torments and the enjoyments of men departed, neither would the world have received their inventions, had there been no foundation in nature to support the romance.

As to such as imagine that the notion of a future life arose from the descriptions and inventions of poets, they may even as well suppose that eating and drinking had the same original, and that men had never thought of it but for the fine feasts and

entertainments which are described in such writers. The poets were the Papists of antiquity, who corrupted the genuine sentiments of nature, and obscured the light of reason, by introducing the wild conceits of folly and superstition: and when once they had grafted the slips of superstition on the stock of nature, they throve so fast, and grew so rank, that the natural branches were even starved by the luxuriancy of this wild olive. But still the root was natural, though the fruit was wild. All that nature teaches is, that there is a future life, distinguished into different states of happiness and misery, in which men will be rewarded or punished according as they have pursued or neglected the rules of virtue and honor. And this notion prevailed where the fables of Greece had never been heard of; and wicked men felt in themselves the fear of the wrath which is to come, though they had never so much as learnt the names of Tantalus or Sisyphus, or any other sufferer in the poets' scene of hell.

The natural evidence then of life and immortality stands equally clear of the inventions of poetry, and the subtilties and refinements of philosophy; and though it be allied to both, yet it arose from neither. The truth of the case with regard to both is this: the poets found men in possession of the doctrine of a future state, with rewards and punishments for good and bad men: on this foundation they went to work; and the plain draught of nature was almost hid under the shades and colors with which they endeavored to beautify and adorn it. The philosophers found the same persuasion in themselves and others, and, as their profession led them, sought out for physical reasons to support the cause. This inquiry has furnished us with the various opinions of antiquity concerning the nature and operation of the soul, its manner of acting in the body and out of it, its eternity and immortality, and many other curious pieces of learning. How far any or all of these inquirers into nature succeeded in their attempt to prove the immortality of the soul from physical causes, is another question. As to the present point, it is plain the natural evidence is not concerned in their success, whatever it is; for the natural evidence is prior to their inquiries, and stands on another foot, on the common sense and apprehension of mankind: and the schools

may determine the soul to be fire, or air, or harmony, or what else they please; yet still nature will make every man feel that the grave will not secure him from appearing before the great tribunal, to which he is accountable.

So true is this, that, had it not been for philosophy, there had remained perhaps no footsteps of any unbelievers in this great article: for the sense of nature would have directed all right; but philosophy misguided many. For those who denied immortality, did not deny the common sense of nature, which they felt as well as others; but they rejected the notice, and thought it false, because they could not find physical causes to support the belief, or thought that they found physical causes effectually to overthrow it. This account we owe to Cicero, one of the best judges of antiquity; who tells us plainly that the reason why many rejected the belief of the immortality of the soul, was, because they could not form a conception of an unbodied soul. So that infidelity is of no older date than philosophy; and a future state was not doubted of till men had puzzled and confounded themselves in their search after the physical reason of the soul's immortality. And now consider how the case stands, and how far the evidence of nature is weakened by the authority of such unbelievers. All mankind receive the belief of a future life, urged to it every day by what they feel transacted in their own breasts: but some philosophers reject this opinion, because they have no conception of a soul distinct from the body; as if the immortality of the soul depended merely on the strength of human imagination. Were the natural evidence of immortality built on any particular notion of a human soul, the evidence of nature might be overthrown by showing the impossibility or improbability of such notion: but the evidence of nature is not concerned in any notion; and all the common notions may be false, and yet the evidence of nature stand good, which only supposes man to be a rational creature, and consequently accountable: and if any philosopher can prove the contrary, he may then, if his word will afterwards pass for any thing, reject this and all other evidence whatever.

The natural evidence, I say, supposes only that man is a rational, accountable creature; and this being the true founda-

tion in nature for the belief of the immortality, the true notion of nature must needs be this; that man, as such, shall live to account for his doings. The question then, on the foot of nature, is this—what constitutes the man? and whoever observes with any care, will find that this is the point on which the learned of antiquity divided. The vulgar spoke of men after death just in the same manner as they did of men on earth: and Cicero observes, that the common error (as he calls it) so far prevailed, that they supposed such things to be transacted *apud inferos, quæ sine corporibus nec fieri possent nec intelligi;* which could neither be done, nor conceived to be done, without bodies. The generality of men could not arrive to abstracted notions of unbodied spirits; and though they could not but think that the body, which was burnt before their eyes, was dissipated and destroyed; yet so great was the force of nature, which was ever suggesting to them that men should live again, that they continued to imagine men with bodies in another life, having no other notion or conception of men.

But with the learned nothing was held to be more absurd than to think of having bodies again in another state: and yet they knew that the true foundation of immortality was laid in this point, that the same individuals should continue. The natural consequence then was from these principles to exclude the body from being any part of the man: and all, I believe, who asserted an immortality, agreed in this notion. The Platonists undoubtedly did; and Cicero has every where declared it to be his opinion: *Tu habeto*, says he, *te non esse mortalem, sed corpus: nec enim is es quem forma ista declarat; sed mens cujusque is est quisque.* It is not you, but your body, which is mortal: for you are not what you appear to be; but it is the mind which is the man. This being the case, the controversy was necessarily brought to turn on the nature of the soul; and the belief of immortality either prevailed or sank, according as men conceived of the natural dignity and power of the soul. For this reason the corporealists rejected the opinion: for since it was universally agreed among the learned that all that was corporeal of man died, they, who had no notion of any thing else, necessarily concluded that the whole man died.

From this view you may judge how the cause of immortality stood, and what difficulties attended it, on the foot of natural religion. All men had a natural sense and expectation of a future life. The difficulty was to account how the same individuals, which lived and died in this world, and one part of which evidently went to decay, should live again in another world. The vulgar, who had no other notion of a man but what came in by their eyes, supposed that just such men as lived in this world should live in the next; overlooking the difficulties which lay in their way, whilst they ran hastily to embrace the sentiments of nature. This advantage they had however, that their opinion preserved the identity of individuals, and they conceived themselves to be the very same with respect to the life to come, as they found themselves to be in regard to the life present. But then, had they been pressed, they could not have stood the difficulties arising from the dissolution of the body, the loss of which, in their way of thinking, was the loss of the individual.

The learned, who could not but see and feel this difficulty, to avoid it, shut out the body from being any part of the man, and made the soul alone to be the perfect individuum. This engaged them in endless disputes on the nature of the soul; and this grand article of natural religion by this means was made to hang by the slender threads of philosophy; and the whole was intirely lost, if their first position proved false, that the soul is the whole man: and it is an assertion which will not perhaps stand the examination. The maintainers of this opinion, though they supposed a sensitive as well as a rational soul in man, which was the seat of the passions, and, consequently, the spring of all human actions; yet this sensitive soul they gave up to death as well as the body, and preserved nothing but the pure intellectual mind. And yet it is something surprising to think that a mere rational mind should be the same individual with a man, who consists of a rational mind, a sensitive soul, and a body. This carries no probability with it at first sight, and reason cannot undertake much in its behalf.

But whatever becomes of these speculations, there is a farther difficulty, which can hardly be got over; which is, that this notion of immortality and future judgment can never serve

the ends and purposes of religion, because it is a notion which the generality of mankind can never arrive at. Go to the villages, and tell the ploughmen, that if they sin, yet their bodies shall sleep in peace; no material, no sensible fire shall ever reach them, but there is something within them purely intellectual, which shall suffer to eternity; you will hardly find that they have enough of the intellectual to comprehend your meaning. Now natural religion is founded on the sense of nature, that is, on the common apprehensions of mankind; and therefore abstracted metaphysical notions, beat out on the anvil of the schools, can never support natural religion, or make any part of it.

In this point then nature seems to be lame, and not able to support the hopes of immortality which she gives to all her children. The expectation of the vulgar, that they shall live again, and be just the same flesh and blood which now they are, is justifiable on no principles of reason or nature. What is there in the whole compass of beings which yields a similitude of dust and ashes rising up again into regular bodies, and to perpetual immortality? On the other side, that the intellectual soul should be the whole man, how justifiable soever it may be in other respects, yet it is not the common sense of nature, and therefore most certainly no part of natural religion.

But it may be worth inquiring how nature comes to be thus defective in this material point. Did not God intend men originally for religious creatures? and if he did, is it not reasonable to expect an original and consistent scheme of religion? which yet in the point now before us seems to be wanting. The account of this we cannot learn from reason or nature; but in the sacred history the fact is cleared beyond dispute. The absurdity on the common notion of immortality arises from the dissolution of the body at death; and the great difficulty on the foot of nature is how to preserve the individuals for judgment, which are evidently destroyed by death. Now, if this death was really a breach on the state of nature, it is no wonder it should be a difficulty in the religion of nature; for the religion of nature was most certainly adapted to the state of nature. And the wise man tells us, 'that God made not death: for he created all things that they might have their being; and the

generations of the world were healthful; and there is no poison of destruction in them; nor the kingdom of death on earth; for righteousness is immortal. But ungodly men with their works and words called it to them.' If immortality was the condition of the creation, if death came in as a surprise on nature, no wonder if she stands mute and astonished at the fatal change, and seems neither willing to part with her hopes of immortality, nor yet able to maintain them. On the plan of nature the common notion of immortality was the true one: for take death out of the question, which is the only separation of soul and body that we know any thing of, and there is no pretence for distinguishing between the man and the intellectual mind. The vulgar certainly retained the true original notion of nature; but when the original state of nature was lost, the notion grew absurd; and it could not be otherwise. God made man immortal, and gave him consistent hopes and fears; man made himself mortal by sin: must not then those hopes, which were consistent hopes on the foot of immortality, become very absurd when joined to a state of mortality? And thus the coming in of death obscured the hopes of immortality.

Lastly, If we consider how our Saviour has enlightened this doctrine, it will appear that he has removed the difficulty at which nature stumbled. As death was no part of the state of nature, so the difficulties arising from it were not provided for in the religion of nature. To remove these was the proper work of revelation: these our Lord has effectually cleared by his gospel, and shown us that the body may and shall be united to the spirit in the day of the Lord, so that the complete man shall stand before the great tribunal to receive a just recompence of reward for the things done in the body. This account is given in the words preceding those of the text: 'who hath abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.' Now, if the abolishing of death was the bringing to light life and immortality, it is plain that the coming in of death was that which darkened nature in this great point of religion.

There are two things, as we learn from our Saviour's answer to the Sadducees, necessary to confirm us in the belief of a resurrection to come; namely, the knowlege of the power of God,

and of the will of God: 'Do ye not therefore err,' says our Lord, 'because ye know not the Scriptures, neither the power of God?' The Scriptures contain the revelation of the will of God; and therefore the words, I reckon, are to be understood as if he had said, Ye err, not knowing the will of God and the power of God. If we are satisfied in these two points, that God both can and will raise the dead, we shall want nothing to assure us of the certainty of a resurrection. The power of God we may learn from reason and nature; for what should make us doubt but that he, who at the first formed man out of dust and ashes into a living soul, should be able to call him into life again out of the same state? But the gospel has declared both his will and his power, which he confirmed in the raising his own Son from the grave; and better evidence we could not have for the possibility and certainty of a resurrection. This evidence of the gospel has reinstated nature in all her hopes, confirmed her right to immortality, and taught her to triumph over death and the grave, which seemed before to be immoveable bars to all her expectations. This has restored religion, which had hardly one sound foot to stand on, and made our faith and our reason consistent, which were before at too great distance. Nature indeed taught us to hope for immortality; but it was in spite of sense and experience, till the great Prince of our peace appeared, 'who brought life and immortality to light through his gospel.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE VII.

ROMANS, CHAP. IV.—VERSE 25.

THE manner of expression used in the text is different from what is generally met with in the New Testament on the like occasion. It is the constant tenor of Scripture that the death of Christ was our redemption, and his blood the price paid for us; so that, when we consider redemption (which includes justification) with respect to Christ, it must be ascribed to his death and passion; but as to ourselves, our justification, though purchased by the blood of Christ, must be appropriated to ourselves through faith in his blood: for the same Apostle who says that we are *justified freely through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus*, says also, *that God hath set him forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood.* Hence we are said to be justified by faith; not that our faith is the purchase of justification, but because through faith we obtain the benefit of the redemption wrought by Christ. Now, though the death of Christ was the reconciling of the world to God, yet this resurrection is the great foundation of our hope and faith in him: hence it is very properly said that *he rose again for our justification:* for his resurrection it is which has wiped away the scandal of the cross, and made it a rational act of faith to hope for life and immortality from him who died on the tree. For truth of this exposition appeal made to 1 Cor. xv. 17., which teaches that faith in the death of Christ, not grounded on the assurance of his resurrection, is a vain faith. The power of the resurrection, with the atonement for sin made by the death of Christ, very beautifully expressed in Rom. viii. 34.

This, which is the true interpretation of the text, shows of what great moment the resurrection of our Lord was, which was to be the basis of the Christian institution, and the ground of our hope and faith in him. Had he died like one of the prophets, and been no more heard of, how should we have believed that his death had atoned for all the blood spilt from the foundation of the world, and that remission of all sin had been granted, through the destruction of him, the greatest of all the prophets? But when he rose from the grave and brought back with him the pardon which he had sealed with his blood, taking on himself to be the Mediator and Intercessor for mankind as he had been their sacrifice, there was no room to doubt the efficacy of his death so confirmed. Our Lord's first coming was attended with mean and low circumstances; *he was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief;* and when he fell a victim to the malice of his foes, his best friends and companions gave him over for lost; *they esteemed him stricken and smitten of God;* all their hopes died with him, and their remembrance of his miracles; and nothing less was thought of, than that *this was he who should redeem Israel.* But when he rose again, having subdued the powers of darkness and of death, then was he declared to be the Son of God with power; and thenceforward our faith has stood in the power and demonstration of the spirit of life: now we may say, *we know in whom we have trusted.*

But if the resurrection of Christ be the support of the Christian faith, how is itself supported? To our apprehension nothing is more incredible than that a man dead and buried should be restored to life again. The particulars of the evidence of this great event too long to be introduced here. Moreover, one ground of objection ought to be removed before they are considered: the great difficulty at which many stick, does not so much arise from the nature of the evidence proposed, as from the nature of the thing itself: they are persuaded that it is not capable of being supported by any evidence at all. This

prejudice was a very early one: *why* (says the Apostle to Agrippa) *should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?* The force of this expostulation considered: whether it is strong enough to encounter the prejudice. The credibility of a thing depends intirely on knowing whether there is, or is not, a power adequate to the undertaking. The resurrection of the dead is a stupendous work: if it depended on us, it would be incredible indeed: it is the work of God, and of him only; and surely we have named one of credit and power sufficient to be trusted: and this is St. Paul's argument, why should it be thought incredible that *God* should raise the dead? Whoever affirms that a resurrection is in itself incredible, must affirm that God has not power to raise the dead. And who is it that can deny to him this power? no one who admits that he made the world: for if he gave us life, what should hinder him from restoring it to us? If there be any contradiction therefore in the notion of a resurrection, there must be the same in that of a creation: hence natural religion is as much concerned in this point as revelation: if we doubt God's power of creation, we must bid adieu to all religion at once.

The power of God being admitted equal to this work, Christ's resurrection comes to be a question of fact, a fact as capable of evidence as any whatever, inasmuch as it is an object of sense. We are told that Christ *died, and rose again:* of his death there can be no great doubt; nor can there be any more difficulty in seeing and knowing that *he* was dead, than in knowing when others were dead: those therefore about him might be trusted when they report that he died. But he came to life again: very true; and it was very easy for those who conversed with him to know whether he was alive or not. His having been dead and buried could not alter the case, or create any difficulty in judging whether he was really alive. Lay these things then together, the promise of God to give us life eternal,

his power to make good his word, the confirmation he has given of our hopes by the resurrection of Christ, and what is wanting to make the belief of this article a rational act of faith? The promises of God have never borrowed help from moral probabilities: the promises made to Abraham did not: but his reliance on those promises, against all the presumptions of human experience and probability, was the very thing that *was imputed to him for righteousness*. This compared with the case of Christians. We have a great promise made to us by God in Christ, the promise of a resurrection to life: past ages have afforded no instance of the kind, and daily experience is, as it were, a witness against this hope: under these difficulties whither shall we go for support? whither, but to the promises themselves, and to the full persuasion, *that what he has promised he is able to perform?* Here is the great article of the Christian faith, even of that faith which will be imputed to us, as it was to Abraham, for righteousness. Conclusion: as the blessed fruit of this faith is to all true believers life and immortality, so it highly concerns us to consider what the event of unbelief must be: for whether we like it or not, *all who are in the grave shall come forth*, some to life, and some to condemnation.

DISCOURSE VII.

ROMANS, CHAP. IV.—VERSE 25.

Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

THE manner of expression here used is different from what is generally to be met with in other parts of the New Testament on the like occasion. Here we are told that Christ was 'delivered' for our 'offences,' and 'raised' for our 'justification;' as if the remission of our sins was to be ascribed peculiarly to the passion, and our justification in the sight of God to the resurrection of Christ: whereas in the chapter before this, verse 25, the Apostle tells us in general that God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation 'through faith in his blood;' and in chap. 5. verse 9. particularly and expressly, 'that, being justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him;' and verse 10. 'that we are reconciled to God by the death of his Son.' In the twentieth of the Acts, the Apostle, in his exhortation to the elders of the church, warns them 'to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood,' verse 28. To the same purpose both St. Peter and St. John speak; the one telling us, 'that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin,' 1 John i. 7; the other, that we have been redeemed 'with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot,' 1 Pet. i. 19.

It is the constant tenor of Scripture, that atonement for the sins of the world was made by our great High Priest on the cross; that his death was our redemption, and his blood the price paid for us. So that, when we consider the redemption (which includes our justification) with respect to Christ, the author and finisher of it, it must be ascribed to his death and passion: but as to ourselves, our title and interest in this com-

mon salvation being grounded on faith, our justification, though purchased by the blood of Christ, must be appropriated to ourselves through faith in that blood: for the same Apostle who has told us that we are 'justified freely through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus,' hath likewise told us 'that God hath set him forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood.' For this reason we are said to be justified by faith; not that our faith is the purchase of justification, which we owe to the blood of Christ alone; but because through faith we obtain the benefit of the redemption wrought by Christ Jesus. Now, though the death of Christ was the reconciling of the world to God, yet the resurrection of Christ is the great and solid foundation of our hope and faith in him, even of our faith in his blood, by which he made the propitiation for our sins: and therefore although Christ died for our offences, and by his precious blood made atonement for our sins; yet, since our faith in his death, our hope in his blood, by which hope and faith we are justified, are built on the truth and credit of his resurrection, it is very properly said that 'he rose again for our justification:' for the death of Christ would have been no justification to us, nor could we have had hope or faith in it, but for the power and glory of the resurrection; which has wiped away the scandal and ignominy of the cross, and made it a rational act of faith to hope for life and immortality from him, who himself once died on the tree.'

For the truth of this exposition I appeal to St. Paul, who, 1 Cor. xv. 17. has told us, 'that, if Christ be not risen, our faith is vain; we are yet in our sins.' So that faith in the death of Christ, not grounded on the assurance of his resurrection, is a vain faith, and such a one as cannot deliver us from our sins. Nay, that the death of Christ could not have been a propitiation for sin without his resurrection, he expressly teaches in the next verse, saying, that, 'if Christ be not raised, then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.'

The power of the resurrection, together with the atonement for sin made by the death of Christ, is very beautifully expressed by St. Paul, Rom. viii. 34. 'Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' The death of Christ freed us from condemna-

tion; but then was our freedom made manifest, when he came from the grave in triumph, and led captivity captive; when he ascended to the right hand of his Father to be our perpetual High Priest and Mediator: for as the Apostle argues, 'if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life;' i. e. by his resurrection to life and to glory.

This account, as it gives the true interpretation of the text, so likewise does it show of what great moment the resurrection of our Lord was, which was to be the basis and support of the whole Christian institution, and the ground of our hope and faith in him. That Christ died the death of a common malefactor, after a life spent in innocency, and a constant and laborious teaching of the great duties of religion and morality, was but common to him, and others before him, whom God had raised up to be shining lights of the world. Thus the prophets of old were persecuted and destroyed by sundry kinds of death: but in their blood there was no expiation for sin: the blood of Abel and of the prophets spoke no such language, but cried to God for vengeance against a cruel and a guilty world. Had Christ died like one of them, and been no more heard of, how should we have believed that his death had atoned for all the rest of the blood that had been spilt from the foundation of the world? or that the whole earth had obtained remission of sin from God by destroying one more, and him the greatest of all the prophets, in the most cruel manner? But when our Lord rose from the grave, and brought back with him the pardon which he had sealed with his own blood; when, instead of executing wrath on his enemies, he sent again the offer of peace and reconciliation, and took on himself to be their Mediator and Intercessor, as he had already been their Sacrifice; what room was there to doubt of the efficacy of his death, the efficacy of which was so undeniably confirmed by his resurrection? or what reason to mistrust the salvation he offered others, when, by saving himself from the power of death, he had given the fullest evidence how able he was to save others also? The most incredulous of his enemies desired him only 'to come down from the cross and they would believe him:' but how much better reason had they to believe him, when he came, not from the cross, but from the

grave, which was by much the surer hold, and from which before no mortal had ever escaped! How undeniable was this testimony of God's love to mankind, that, after the ill reception his Son had found among them, after all the cruel usage he had experienced, and the ignominious death he had suffered, he yet sent him once more from the grave to convince unbelievers, and to proclaim and confirm the pardon he had purchased for them!

His first coming was attended with a mean birth and narrow fortune; his education was suitable to his condition; and the greatest part of his life spent in obscurity: 'he had no form or comeliness that we should desire him; he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:' and when he fell a victim to the malice and rage of the people, his best friends, the constant companions of his sorrow, gave him over for lost; 'they esteemed him stricken and smitten of God:' all their hopes died with him, and the remembrance of his miracles and mighty works was buried in the same tomb with himself; and nothing less was thought of than that 'this was he who should redeem Israel from all his sins.' But when he came again from the bosom of the earth, having subdued the powers of darkness and of death, then was he declared to be the Son of God with power; and the glory as of the only-begotten Son of God shone clearly through the veil of flesh which had so long obscured it. And from thenceforth our faith has stood, not in the words which the wisdom or cunning of man teacheth, but in the power and demonstration of the Spirit of life: and we can with assurance say, 'we know in whom we have trusted,' expecting life and salvation from him alone, who is the Lord of life and glory. But after all, if the resurrection of Christ is the support of all other articles of the Christian faith, how is itself supported? To our common apprehension nothing is more incredible than that a man dead and buried should be restored to life again.

To go into the particulars of the evidence of this great event, recorded in Scripture and the oldest writers of the church, would open too large a field of discourse at present; and indeed there are some objections which naturally arise in the minds of men, which ought previously to that inquiry to be removed; for the great difficulty at which men stick, does not arise so

much from the nature of the evidence we propose, as from the nature of the thing itself. The presumptions against the possibility of a resurrection operate so strongly in the minds of some, that they think it needless to inquire what evidence there is for it, being persuaded that the thing itself is not capable of being supported by any evidence. This prejudice was a very early one; for the Apostle expostulates this case with king Agrippa: 'Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?'

Let us consider the force of this expostulation, and see whether it is strong enough to encounter the prejudice.

Now, nothing can be said to be incredible, if there is a power in any person able to effect it; for if there is such a power, that power may bring into existence that very thing which you doubt of; and it cannot be incredible that a thing should exist, which may possibly really exist. If we consider only the strength of children, it is incredible that they should build castles; but if we consider the strength and ability of men, it would be ridiculous to doubt whether they could or no. So that the credibility or incredibility of any thing depends on knowing whether there is, or is not, a power adequate to the undertaking. The resurrection of the dead is in truth a very stupendous work: but neither you nor I am to undertake it: if it depended on us, it would be incredible indeed. It is the work of God, and of him only; and surely I have named one of credit and power sufficient to be trusted in this great affair. And this is St. Paul's argument, why should it be thought incredible 'that God should raise the dead?' whoever therefore affirms that a resurrection is in itself a thing incredible, must affirm that it is incredible that God has power to raise the dead. And now consider who it is that can, consistently with the common and allowed principles of reason and nature, deny this power to God. No one certainly, who admits that God made the world, can entertain this doubt; for if God has given us the life we now enjoy, what should hinder him from restoring life again, after this is lost? Can there be more difficulty in giving life the second time than there was at first? If there be any contradiction therefore in the notion of a resurrection, there must be the very same in the notion of crea-

tion. And therefore natural religion is just as much concerned in this point as revelation; for though the belief of the fact, that the dead shall be raised, depends on revelation; yet our belief that God has power to raise the dead depends not on revelation, but on the clear dictates of reason, of that reason by which we discover him to be our Creator. And if you doubt even of this his power of creation, you must bid adieu to all religion at once: for if God created not the world, how are you at all related to him? If he did not make us, what right he has to govern us, or what pretence to our obedience, neither you from nature, nor we from revelation, can ever be satisfied.

The power of God being admitted to be equal to this work, the question of the resurrection of Christ comes to be a question of fact; and though I propose not to enter into the evidence of the fact, yet it may be proper to observe that a resurrection considered as a fact, is a fact as capable of evidence as any whatever; it is an object of sense, of every sense by which we judge of the reality of things without us.

We are told, 'that Christ died and rose again.' Of his death I suppose there is no great doubt: die he certainly did: and surely there could be no more difficulty to see and know that he was dead, than in knowing when others were dead, from Adam to this day. One would think, therefore, that those about him, who saw him crucified and buried, might be trusted when they report that he died.

But he came to life again: very true; and it was very easy for those who conversed with him to know whether he was alive or no. There was no more difficulty in judging of his being alive, than of judging, in any other case, whether those we converse with are alive or no. His having been dead and buried could not possibly alter the case, or create any difficulty in judging whether he was really alive or no. So that the resurrection, considered as a fact, was in every part of it an object of sense, and as capable of being well attested as any other object of sense whatever. Lay these things together, the promise of God to give us life eternal, his power to make good his word, the confirmation he has given us of our hope by the resurrection of Christ; and what is wanting to make the belief of this article a rational act of faith?

The promises of God have never borrowed help from moral probabilities. The promises to Abraham were not of this kind? so far otherwise, that it is said of him, that, 'against hope he believed in hope;' that is, he hoped where, humanly speaking, there was no ground for hope. There was no probability that his seed, who was a stranger and pilgrim on earth, should inherit the land of Canaan, possessed by great and powerful nations.

The promise of a son to him, when he and his wife were both too far advanced in years to expect one in the ordinary course of nature, was contrary to experience and to natural probability. But what says the Apostle? 'Abraham not being weak in faith, considered not his own body, now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. But he staggered not at the promise of God—being fully persuaded that what he had promised he was able to perform.' This reliance on the promises of God, against all the presumptions of human experience and probability, was the very thing, as St. Paul tells us, that 'was imputed to him for righteousness.'

Compare now this case with the case of Christians. We have great promises made to us by God in Christ Jesus, the promises of a resurrection to life. Inquire of the world; they know of no such thing, the ages past have afforded no instance of this kind, and, as far as they can see and judge, daily experience is a witness against this hope. Under these difficulties, whither shall we go for refuge and support? whither! but to the promises of God, and to this full persuasion, 'that what he has promised he is able to perform.' If we hold fast this persuasion, and stagger not through unbelief, then shall we indeed be the children of the faith of Abraham, whose 'faith was imputed to him for righteousness:' for as St. Paul tells us, this testimony of Abraham's faith 'was not written for his sake alone, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead.' Here then is the great article of Christian faith, even of that faith which will be imputed to us for righteousness: it is a firm confidence and reliance on God, under this peculiar character, that he is the raiser-up of the dead, and will, according to his promise, raise us to life eternal.

For the confirmation of this hope and faith God raised his own Son from the grave; who for that reason is said to be raised for 'our justification,' since on the authority and credit of his resurrection depends that great article of faith, by which alone we are to be justified.

As the blessed fruit of this faith is to all true believers life and immortality, so it highly concerns us to consider what the event of unbelief must be. Many would perhaps content themselves without the hopes of glory and future happiness, if that was all. But that is not all: 'for the dead shall be raised,' whether you like it or like it not; 'all who are in the grave shall come forth,' some to life, some to condemnation, according to the things done in the body. Nothing can secure to us more effectually a happy state in futurity, than a constant and steady belief and expectation of the resurrection of the dead. This will convince us that what we are now doing are not such trifling things as to be soon forgotten, or attended with consequences only for to-day or to-morrow; but they are things long to be remembered, things noted down in God's book, and will be exposed to view at the great day in the presence of men and of angels, and be attended with consequences through all the ages of eternity, to our great honor and happiness, or to our great confusion and misery.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE VIII.

ROMANS, CHAP. VIII.—VERSE 16.

WHAT it is to be the children of God explained: it implies all the advantages that belong to, and all the qualities necessary to make a good Christian: *if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ:* as this is a new state, which belongs not to us by nature, our entrance into it is styled a *new birth:* and this new life we receive by the ministration of the Holy Spirit; and therefore we are said *to be born of the Spirit:* he is the earnest of our inheritance, the pledge and security which we receive from God of our future immortality: but the difficulty is, how to make the first step, and to know assuredly that we are the children of God. Here the Apostle tells us, *that the Spirit itself,* i. e. the same Spirit by which we are made children, *beareth witness with our spirit,* &c. It is a matter of dispute, what sort of evidence the Apostle here means, and what kind of certainty arises from it: some opinions stated: present discussion confined to St. Paul, and the endeavor to collect his meaning in the text. In this three things considered:—I. how many witnesses St. Paul points out, and who they are: II. what kind of evidence each of them gives in this case: III. what the result of their evidence is, and with what kind of certainty we know *that we are the children of God.* I. According to our translation, the witnesses are evidently two in number: the Spirit of adoption which Christians receive is one witness, and our own spirit is the other. The vulgar Latin and several other translators render the words to the following effect: *the Spirit itself beareth*

witness to our spirit: according to this sense, which is held by Grotius, Crellius, and some others, there is but one witness, the Spirit of adoption who beareth witness *to* our spirit: but our translation is right: this shown by the invariable signification of the word συμμαρτυρεῖν in the New Testament, instanced in Romans ii. 15. ix. 1. We have therefore two witnesses; and who they are, is next considered. Who the first Spirit is must be learnt from what goes before: in verses 2, 9, 11, and 15 of this chapter, we read of *the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, the Spirit of God and of Christ, the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus,* and *the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry Abba, Father.* In the verse of the text reference is made to this Spirit: but the question is, whether *Spirit* in all these places be the name of a person, or whether it denotes only a quality or temper belonging to Christians, as in Phil. ii. 5. which sense Crellius and others maintain, and explain the text thus: *our evangelical spirit,* or *temper, is a sufficient argument to our own minds that we are the children of God.* This point is not disputed here, as it would occasion too long a controversy: but though the Spirit of Christ sometimes is used in this sense, is it so used in the text? This Spirit is the Spirit of life, *by which we are made free* from the heavy yoke of sin, which the Apostle had been describing in the preceding chapter: now an evangelical spirit is not the cause, but the consequent of this freedom. Again, it is the Spirit of him who raised up Christ, i. e. the Spirit *by* which he wrought that miracle, as is evident from taking the whole of the eleventh verse together; it is the Holy Spirit, who is mighty in works and wonders. Lastly, it is the Spirit of adoption, by which we are made sons: the Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of which we are born in Christ; of which birth an evangelical temper is the effect, not the cause: so that it appears this first witness is the Holy Spirit of God: the second is our own spirit, that is, our mind and conscience. *Who knoweth*

the things of a man, save the spirit of a man that is in him?
II. Inquiry into what evidence each of them gives in this case. For this we must look back to the latter part of the foregoing chapter, to which this verse of the text relates: for in all this eighth chapter there is not one word said before of our own mind or spirit, nor the least hint of any evidence which it gives of our being the children of God. The great privileges mentioned in this chapter, such as the being made free from the law of sin and death, the walking not after the flesh, but after the Spirit, these being such as we receive from the Spirit of God, are evidences of the Spirit for our regeneration: where then must we look for the evidence of our own spirit? This difficulty put the Greek commentators on a very forced interpretation of the passage: for observing that all the signs of adoption proceeded from the power and working of the Holy Spirit, in effect they made the two witnesses of the text but one. Thus Chrysostom by *the Spirit itself* understands the Holy Spirit; and by *our spirit*, the gift of the Holy Spirit within us. This interpretation refuted. Keeping, then, to the sense already laid down, we must consider what St. Paul had in view when he penned the place in question. In this Apostle's writings we must often search for the connexion at a considerable distance from the passage: with respect to the one before us, in the latter part of chapter vii. he describes the state of an unregenerate Jew, or heathen, in order to show to his converts the necessity of redemption through Christ, as neither the law of Moses nor of nature could free them from the power of sin, nor from death which follows it: then in this 8th chapter he sets forth the power of redemption, showing how it supplies the infirmities both of the Law and of Nature: to clear the matter still more, what he says of the unregenerate man's condition in chap. vii. is more particularly examined: he is described as under the most wretched slavery to sin, though with the greatest reluctance to his own mind and reason; as loving God and his

Law, but obeying the tyrant sin: so that the evidence of reason even in a state of nature, shows that we are the servants and sons of God; but power constrains us, lust rules over us, and experience shows that we are the slaves of sin: to complete this evidence of our minds, nothing more is wanting than to destroy the power of sin, which will enable us to follow the dictates of reason, and obey the laws of God: for this is complete evidence that a man is a son and servant of God, that he loves and obeys him. In the 8th chapter, then, St. Paul tells us that the redemption by Christ has put an end to our wretched captivity: the power of the Spirit has destroyed the power of sin: but the power of the Spirit is on reason's side and works with it; so that to be under this power is a state of freedom; and therefore it is justly said, that the law of the Spirit of life hath made us free: the consequence is, that *we walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit—that we mind the things of the Spirit—mortify the deeds of the body—are the sons of God—cry Abba, Father:* now this is to walk according to our own mind acted on by reason; and to cry Abba, Father, proceeds from a filial duty and reverence: this we owe to the Spirit; for before, though our minds consented to his laws, we were still sinners, and conscience kept us back from our Father: but now, like children, we run to his embrace with words of affection; and thus (says the Apostle,) *the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God.*

In the last place it is considered, what the result of this evidence is, and with what certainty we may know that we are children of God. First, it must be observed that these two evidences strengthen each other, and must both meet to give us the assurance we expect: we must have the evidence of our own spirit that we love and approve God's laws, and that of the Spirit of God working in us by obedience. Two ways of judging ourselves; *inward* and *outward* signs of grace: inward purity and love, with acts of obedience and conformity

thereto: hence it appears that the evidence of the Spirit is not any secret inspiration, or any assurance conveyed to the mind, but the evidence of works, such as by the Spirit we perform: hence also, it appears that some go too far on the other side, by denying that any man may know himself to be in a state of grace: for all the children of God are in that state; and the evidence of the Spirit of God and our own spirit may make us certain, when they concur, that we are the children of God: *if our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God.* But lastly; this certainty does not extend to future and final salvation: for to be in a state of grace, is to be an heir of salvation; but an heir may be defeated, if by any after-act he incapacitate himself to inherit: our certainty reaches to our present condition, which is enough to keep our minds easy: other certainty than this might make us remiss: this may encourage us *to run with patience the race that is set before us.*

DISCOURSE VIII.

ROMANS, CHAP. VIII.—VERSE 16.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

To be the children of God is the greatest privilege under the gospel, and, consequently, implies in it all the advantages that belong to, and all the qualities necessary to make, a good Christian. Thus our Apostle argues: 'if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.' As this is a new state, which belongs not to us by nature, so our entrance into it is styled a new birth; and we are said 'to be born again,' and 'to be begotten again,' to these hopes: he, from whom we receive these hopes, is the Father that begets us, and his children we are: and therefore, as we receive our spiritual life from the gift and mercy of God, he is our father, and we are his children. Thus St. Peter tells us, 'that we are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever:' 1 Pet. i. 23. This new life we receive by the ministration of the Spirit: the powers which belong to this life, and in which it consists, depend on the influences of the Spirit: and therefore we are said 'to be born of the Spirit.' He is the earnest of our inheritance, the pledge and security which we receive from God of our future immortality: our right of inheritance depends on the relation we bear to God of sons and children: and therefore the Spirit of adoption, by which we are born to God, is the pledge and security of our inheritance, as he is styled by our Apostle.

But the difficulty is, how to make the first step, and to know assuredly that we are the children of God. When once we are sure of this, it will not be hard to believe that God will provide for his own children, and secure to them an inheritance that fadeth not away. And here the Apostle tells us, 'that the

Spirit itself,' that is, the same Spirit by which we are made children, 'beareth witness with our Spirit, that we are the children of God.' It is matter of great dispute, what sort of evidence the Apostle here means, and what kind of certainty arises from it. Some have placed this evidence among the gifts of the Spirit, and supposed it to be given on purpose to assure the elect of the certainty of their salvation. Others maintain that no man, unless it be specially revealed to him by God, can ever know that he is in a state of security in this life: and this opinion was received and confirmed by the Council of Trent, as may be seen at large in the sixth session. It will not be worth my pains or your patience to enter into the niceties of this controversy; and therefore I shall confine myself to St. Paul, and endeavor to show you his meaning in the text, which will go a great way towards giving us right notions and apprehensions in this matter. In order to this, I propose three things to be considered:

First, How many witnesses St. Paul points out to us in the text, and who they are.

Secondly, What kind of evidence each of them gives in this case.

Thirdly, What the result of their evidence is, and with what kind of certainty we know 'that we are the children of God.'

First, We are to consider how many witnesses St. Paul points out to us in the text, and who they are. As our translators have represented St. Paul's meaning, there is no room for dispute concerning the number of the witnesses, which are evidently two: 'the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit:' the Spirit itself, that is, the Spirit of adoption, which Christians receive, is one witness; and our own spirit is the other witness. But the vulgar Latin, and several other translators, render the words to this effect: 'the Spirit itself beareth witness to our spirit.' According to this sense, which is maintained by Grotius and Crellius, and some others, there is but one witness, the Spirit of adoption, who bears evidence to our spirit. But the words in the original evidently imply the sense which our translators follow: Αὐτὸ τὸ Πνεῦμα συμμαρτυρεῖ τῷ πνεύματι ἡμῶν. Συμμαρτυρεῖν signifies to be a fellow-witness, or to witness the same thing that another does: and so the word constantly

signifies in Scripture, and is never used but where there is a concurrent evidence of two witnesses. We meet with the same word in Rom. ii. 15. 'which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another.' And to this place Grotius sends us, to show that the word is used of one single witness only; as here the conscience only is said to bear witness. But a little attention will show us in this place another witness: the Apostle proves from the evidence of conscience, that the Gentiles had the work or matter of the law written in their hearts: the law testifies to men what is good and what is evil: if conscience testifies the same thing to be good and just which the law does, then conscience proves the matter of the law to be written in the heart; if it testifies any thing else, so be it: but no other evidence will prove the Apostle's assertion, that the Gentiles have the work of the law written in their heart. And therefore the Apostle's argument stands thus: the Gentiles show the work of the law to be written in their heart by the testimony of their conscience, which agrees with the testimony of the law; their conscience and the law both allowing and forbidding the same thing. So that the Apostle's argument plainly supposes the concurrent evidence of the law and of conscience. And therefore, even here the word *συμμαρτυρεῖν* points out two witnesses to us. The same word is used by St. Paul in the first verse of the ninth chapter of the Romans: 'I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness,' *συμμαρτυρούσης μοι*. But here evidently are two witnesses to the same thing. When a man does not speak the truth, it is certain that he witnesses one thing, and his conscience witnesses another, and are therefore two distinct witnesses: so are they likewise when a man speaks truth; for the same evidence will not make two witnesses to be one witness. And therefore here also there are two witnesses; St. Paul, who witnessed his affection to his countrymen; and his conscience, which witnessed for his sincerity. The word is used but once more in the New Testament, and that is in the last chapter of the Revelations;* and there it is used with

* Griesbach however has in this instance altered the text, and substituted *μαρτυρῶ* for *συμμαρτυροῦμαι*. Ed.

respect to a testimony, in which Christ, and his Angel whom he sent to the churches, and even St. John, were concerned. So that the word is every where used of the concurrent evidence of two or more witnesses. And this being the constant use of the word, there can be no reason given why it should not be taken in the same sense here, and rendered, 'The Spirit itself beareth witness,' not 'to,' but 'with,' or 'together with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' Here then are two witnesses; and who they are is next to be considered.

Who the first Spirit is, must be learnt from what goes before. In the second verse of this chapter we read of 'the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, which hath made us free from the law of sin and of death:' in the ninth verse he is called 'the Spirit of God and of Christ;' in the eleventh verse, 'the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead;' in the fifteenth verse, 'the Spirit of adoption, by which we cry Abba, Father.' In the verse of the text reference is had to this Spirit: 'the Spirit itself,' that is, the Spirit which has made us free in Christ Jesus, the Spirit by which we have received adoption, does itself bear witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God. But the question then is, whether Spirit in all these places be the name of a person, or whether it denotes only a quality and temper belonging to Christians; so that the Spirit of Christ shall signify no more than the mind of Christ does in another place, 'Let the same mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus;' that is, the same temper and disposition. This sense Crellius maintains, and others after him; and thus he explains the text: our evangelical spirit, that is, as he explains himself in another place, our evangelical temper, is a sufficient argument to our own minds that we are the children of God. I mean not to dispute this point with Crellius and his brethren, the Socinians; which would be to run into a great controversy: but since the Spirit of Christ may and does sometimes signify both ways, I shall endeavor to point out to such as have no private prejudices to be maintained, which sense is here to be followed. First then, this Spirit is the Spirit of life, by which we are made free; that is, by which we are regenerated in Christ Jesus, and set at liberty from the heavy yoke of sin, which the Apostle had been describing in the foregoing chapter. Now, an evangelical temper is not the cause, but the conse-

quent of this freedom. The Spirit of God is the efficient cause; of whom we are said for that reason to be born. Secondly, It is the Spirit of him who raised up Christ; that is, the Spirit by which he wrought that great wonder and miracle, as is evident by taking the whole eleventh verse together: 'If the Spirit of him who raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.' So that the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead, is the Spirit 'by which' he raised Christ from the dead; that is, the Holy Spirit, who is mighty in works and wonders. Lastly, It is the Spirit of adoption by which we are made sons: the Spirit of adoption is the Spirit of which we are born in Christ; of which birth an evangelical temper is not the cause, but the effect. So that, by the whole tenor of the Apostle's arguing, it appears that the Spirit which beareth witness with our spirit, is the Holy Spirit of God, which works together with our spirit to enable us to perform the just and holy will of God. As to the second witness, our own spirit, I need not spend much time to tell you who it is, since most are agreed that it is our own mind. 'Who knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of a man which is in him?' that is, save his mind and conscience. So then the faithful Christian has two witnesses of his being the Son of God; the Holy Spirit of God, and his own mind and conscience.

Let us therefore, in the second place, inquire, what evidence each of them gives in this case. In order to this, we must look back to the latter part of the foregoing chapter, to which this verse of the text relates: for in all this eighth chapter there is not one word said before of our mind or spirit, nor the least hint of any evidence that it gives of our being the children of God. Our crying Abba, Father, in the fifteenth verse, is very improperly pitched on by some as the evidence proceeding from our own mind; since it is said expressly that we cry Abba, Father, by the Spirit of adoption: so that our crying Abba, Father, is an evidence coming not from our own minds, but from the Holy Spirit. The power to do good comes from the influence of the Holy Spirit; and therefore the good we do is such an evidence of our being the sons of God, as we stand

obliged to the Spirit of God for: 'As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God:' ver. 14. To be led by the Spirit, is 'through the Spirit to mortify the deeds of the flesh:' ver. 13. So that our victory over the flesh is the effect of our having the Holy Spirit to assist and to strengthen us, and is consequently, as it is a great evidence and assurance to us of our being the children of God, the evidence of that Spirit from whom it proceeds; that is, not our own spirit, but the Spirit of God. So that the great privileges mentioned in this chapter, such as being made free from the law of sin and death, of walking not after the flesh, but the Spirit, being such as we receive from the Spirit of God, are therefore evidences of the Spirit for our regeneration.

But where then must we look for the evidence of our own spirit? since all the marks and signs of regeneration mentioned in this eighth chapter manifestly belong to the evidence of the Holy Spirit. This difficulty put the Greek commentators on a very forced interpretation of this place; for observing that all the signs of adoption mentioned by the Apostle proceeded from the power and working of the Holy Spirit, in effect they made the two witnesses of the text but one. Thus Chrysostom by the Spirit itself understands the Holy Spirit; and by our spirit he understands the gift of the Holy Spirit within us: 'What is this?' says he: 'the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit.' To which he answers, 'The Comforter beareth witness to the gift bestowed on us; for the voice, that is, of crying Abba, Father, belongs not only to the gift of grace, but likewise to the Spirit who bestows the grace.' The gifts of the Spirit are sometimes called by the name of Spirit. The gift of prophecy is styled the spirit of prophecy. But I do not remember that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are ever styled 'our spirit' in sacred writ. Besides, as I observed before, this reduces the two witnesses to one; for how does the Spirit bear witness but by the gifts and graces bestowed on us? and if so, then the evidence of the gift, and the evidence of the Spirit, are one and the same evidence.

Keeping therefore to the sense already laid down, let us consider what St. Paul had in his view when he penned the place now before us. Those who are conversant in St. Paul's writ-

ings need not be told that they must not always search for the connexion within a verse or two of what they read. The Apostle often looks back to what went before at some distance, and, after a long chain of consequences, returns to his point without giving his reader notice. This might be made plain by instances, were it our business at present to examine the manner or way of St. Paul's writing. But as to the place before us: in the latter part of the seventh chapter St. Paul describes the state of an unregenerate Jew or heathen; for what he says equally belongs to both. This he does in order to show them the necessity of redemption through Christ, inasmuch as neither the law of Moses nor of nature could free them from the power and dominion of sin, nor, consequently, from death, which ever follows close at the heels of sin. That this was the Apostle's intent appears from the lamentation he makes over the state of nature, and the remedy he immediately proposes of faith through Christ: 'O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death! I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' And then in this eighth chapter he sets forth the power of redemption, showing, in every part, how it supplies the weaknesses and infirmities both of the law and of nature. The unregenerate man 'was brought into captivity to the law of sin,' chap. vii. 23. 'But the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made us free from the law of sin and of death,' ver. 2. In the unregenerate man 'there dwelleth no good thing,' ver. 18. but in the Christian 'dwelleth the Spirit of Christ,' ver. 9. So that the Apostle's main design here is, I think, pretty evident. But to clear the matter before us, we must more particularly examine what he says of the unregenerate man's condition. He describes him as under the most wretched slavery, obeying sin with the greatest reluctance to his own mind and reason: 'that which I do, I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I:' ver. 15. His mind he allows to be uncorrupted, and to stand firm to the law of God, approving the things which are good; but then the lusts and appetites of the flesh are too strong for it, and force it into the obedience of the law of sin, which it hates and condemns: 'I find a law,' says he, 'that when I would do good, evil is present with me:

for I delight in the law of God after the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin, which is in my members:' ver. 21, 22, 23. See then the divided empire of sin and reason: reason approves what is just and holy, consents to and delights in the law of God; but sin captivates and enthrals it, and makes the man the slave of sin, though the admirer and approver of virtue. The upshot of the whole matter is, as St. Paul in the last verse expresses it, 'With the mind,' or spirit, 'I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.' And now consider what assistance this condition requires: the man's spirit is right and pure; it loves, it delights in, it approves the law of God; and could he follow the dictates of his reason, and obey the law of God as well as love it, and practise holiness as well as approve it, he would want no other evidence of his being the son and servant of God: 'his servants ye are,' says the Apostle, 'to whom ye obey.' The man who is taken captive and carried into slavery, obeys by force his tyrant's law; but he loves his own country and king, and longs to come under the obedience of his natural prince again. As to his own mind, he knows whose subject he is and would be; but outward necessity shows him that he is a slave by the constrained obedience he yields to the foreign law. Take off force, and the man's own inclinations will return him soon to his natural obedience. And this is not unlike the case St. Paul puts the unregenerate man in: he loves God and his law; but he obeys the tyrant sin. Destroy the power of sin, and reason will return him to the obedience of God, and soon show whose true son and servant he is. So that the evidence of reason, even in the state of nature, shows us that we are the servants and sons of God: but power constrains us, lust and appetite rule over us, and woful experience shows us that we are the slaves of sin. Now, to complete this evidence of our minds, and to render it convincing to ourselves and others that we are indeed the children of God, what more is wanting than to destroy the power of sin, and to give us up to follow the dictates of reason in obeying the just laws and commands of God? For this is a complete evidence that any man is the son and servant of God, that he loves him, that he obeys him, and

keeps his commandments. You see then what the evidence of our own spirit is: it loves and delights in the law of God, and is restless to obey the law it loves: 'with the mind I serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin:' which words I desire you to bear in your memory, whilst I set forth to you the evidence of the Spirit of God.

In the eighth chapter St. Paul tells us that the redemption by Christ Jesus has put an end to the wretched captivity we lived under: 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.' Law here signifies power; for power is a law to those who live under it. Now then the power of the Spirit has destroyed the power of sin. The power of sin was opposite to the mind and reason of man; so that man, whilst he lived under that power, was a slave. But the power of the Spirit is on reason's side, and works together with it; so that to be under this power is a state of freedom and liberty: and therefore it is justly said, that the law of the Spirit of life hath made us free. The consequence of our being under the power of the Spirit is, 'that we walk not after the flesh, but the Spirit,' verse 4; 'that we mind the things of the Spirit,' verse 5; 'that we mortify the deeds of the body,' verse 13; 'that we are the sons of God,' verse 14; 'that we cry Abba, Father,' verse 15. These are the fruits of the Spirit. Now, to walk after the Spirit, and to do the deeds of the Spirit, is to walk according to our own mind and reason; for reason approved the things of God, and the things of the Spirit are the things of God. To cry Abba, Father, proceeds from a settled and undisturbed mind, from filial duty and reverence. Children, who live in disobedience to their parents, are not apt to meet them with these endearing expressions: but when the child loves, and is under no rebukes of conscience for misbehavior towards his parent, he meets him with these words of love and of confidence. This, therefore, we owe to the Spirit: for before, however our minds consented to his laws, yet still we were sinners, and conscience stood between us and our Father; so that we could not approach without fear and trembling, our minds still representing him to us rather as an injured Lord, than as a tender Father. But since the power of the Spirit hath stilled the horrid con-

test that was in us between reason and sin, and that we both love and obey him, we now no longer fear his presence; but, like children longing for the return of a kind father, we run out to embrace him, with words of friendship and affection in our mouths, crying Abba, Father: and by this means, says St. Paul, 'the Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' 'With the mind,' says the Apostle before, 'I serve the law of God:' and now, says he, by the Spirit you obey the same law; and the Spirit of God and your spirit agree to give you the utmost assurance of being the children of God. You are no longer in the sad condition before described, the mind leaning one way and the flesh another; so that you desired to do one thing, but yet did the contrary, and were always restless and uneasy, rebuked within and constrained without: for the Spirit, by which you are now ruled, consents to your mind, and is bent to perform the same things which the mind approves; from whence you may have the greatest confidence towards God: for what more perfect obedience can there be, than that to which both outward and inward man consent? or what plainer signs can you have of a good son and servant, than to know that he loves the law of his father and obeys it? Love the law indeed you did before; but obey it you could not: but now by the Spirit you obey it, and have the greatest satisfaction, both from within and without, that you are the children of God. This may suffice to show the Apostle's meaning, and to explain the nature of the evidence which each spirit gives.

We must now, in the last place, consider what the result of this evidence is, and with what kind of certainty we may know that we are the children of God.

And first, you must take notice that these two evidences strengthen and support each other, and must both meet to give us the assurance we expect. We must have the evidence of our own spirit that we do indeed love and approve the law of God; and we must have the evidence of the Spirit of God working in us by obedience: and when we both love and obey the commands of God, we want nothing farther to assure us that we are the children of God; but where either of these is wanting, the evidence of the other avails nothing. If you

love and approve the command, but do not obey, you are self-condemned, you are in your sins; lust has dominion over you, and not the Spirit of God. If you obey the law, and conform outwardly to it, but do not love and like it, you are a hypocrite, no servant of God, but of the world; and your outward compliance is fleshly wisdom, and not the work of the Spirit.

So then you have two ways of judging yourselves, which must both concur; you have inward and outward signs of grace: the inward signs are a pure conscience, a sincere love for God and religion, and whatever tends to the glory and honor of your Maker: the outward signs are acts of obedience conformable to the inward purity and love of your mind. These are fruits by which you may judge yourselves. Our Saviour tells us, 'that we may know men by their fruits:' much rather may we know ourselves by our own fruits, especially when we may know the stock too from whence they grow, the motions and workings of our own heart.

Hence it appears that the evidence of the Spirit is not any secret inspiration, or any assurance conveyed to the mind of the faithful; but it is the evidence of works, such as by the Spirit we perform: and therefore the only sign of sanctification is holiness; and the only mark of grace is to obey from the heart the word of God; and therefore they err, not knowing the Scriptures, who from this or the like passages imagine that the Spirit ever gives, or was ever designed to give, inward assurance or certainty to men of their final state.

Hence, likewise, it is certain that some go too far on the other side, by denying that any man may know himself to be in a state of grace: for all the children of God are in a state of grace; and the evidence of the Spirit of God and our own spirit may make us certain, where they concur, as they ought to do, that we are the children of God. 'If our hearts condemn us not, then have we confidence towards God:' which is St. John's rule, and comprehends both the evidences in the text; for our heart judges both of our inward and outward obedience: and therefore, where our hearts condemn us not, we have the evidence of both spirits, the end of which is confidence.

But, lastly, this certainty does not extend to our future and final salvation: for to be in a state of grace is to be heir of salvation: but an heir may be defeated, if by any after-act he incapacitates himself to inherit. In a word, a state of grace may be lost; he that is the child of God may cease to be the child of God: and therefore being certain and confident that you are now in a state of grace, cannot make you certain of your salvation; but you must still 'work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' This we may learn from our Apostle's own arguing here: 'The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' The consequence of this is, 'if children, then heirs,' verse 17. 'But now are we heirs through hope,' he tells us in another place; and at the twenty-fourth verse of this chapter, 'we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope.' Certainty shuts out hope: and since being children makes us only heirs through hope, it is plain, being certain that we are now the children of God can give us no absolute certainty of our salvation: and therefore it is great presumption to talk of security. Our certainty reaches to our present condition, which is enough to keep our minds easy and contented. Other certainty than this might make us remiss: this may encourage us 'to run with patience the race that is before us, and to labor in the Lord, knowing that our labor shall not be in vain.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE IX.

JOHN, CHAP. XX.—VERSES 30, 31.

THIS account given by St. John to prevent the suspicions which some might entertain of their preachers, when they found the great evidences insisted on by them not mentioned by him, who, as the latest Evangelist, might be supposed to be the most accurate. But why, speaking of the miracles of Jesus, does he notice only that *they were done in the presence of the disciples?* whereas they were done in the most open and public manner; by which much credibility is added to them, as the Apostle well knew. The reason of this is, that it was not to St. John's purpose on their publicity: he is speaking of the authoritative promulgation of the gospel, and this led him no further than to observe that its publishers were eye-witnesses of what they attested, and therefore unexceptionable witnesses. Reason also assigned in the text, which moved St. John to publish his gospel, and which extends to all the other writings of the New Testament. The gospels were published to be a standing evidence to all ages of God's purpose to redeem the world by his Son, who *might die for our sins, and rise again for our justification:* and it was absolutely necessary to convey this knowlege to the world by a proper authority: impossible to obey any law before we know what the law is: this equally applicable to revelation; and an insufficient promulgation is no promulgation: all the necessary qualifications to constitute a proper witness to revelation need not be stated: sufficient to observe that no man is *naturally* qualified for it, because all natural qualifications may be counterfeited. Things

in common life are readily believed on the report of honest men, but the moral probability of such things goes far in rendering them credible: it requires another kind of evidence to make the mind submit to the belief of things out of the course of nature: hence men must be extraordinarily qualified to promulgate a revelation: we rely not, in such case, merely on their moral honesty, but on their authority proved by miracles, and on their integrity established by what they did and suffered in the cause. But, it may be asked, how shall we distinguish between the many and various pretences to revelation? is it not the more sure way to take up with natural religion, which is every where the same, and in which there is no danger of our being misled by imposture! To form a true judgment on this case it is necessary to state the question rightly on the footing of this objection. First then, the question must relate to revelation considered only as the rule and measure of religion: it is absurd to bring instances of any revelations which do not pretend to this property, and were never pretended to be given as a rule of religion, such as the oracles recorded in the Greek and Roman histories, or even the particular messages which God sent by different prophets to the Jews: for these revelations, being confined to particular occasions, have no relation to our inquiry concerning a rule of religion: this in great measure overthrows the truth of the fact on which the objection is built: for though in the heathen world there were sundry pretences to revelation, yet not any one was set up as a common standard for the religion of mankind: that none claimed such privilege, is evident from the answer of the oracle to the inquiry, which religion was best? This was, that every man should worship according to the custom of the country where he was: so that all religions were esteemed equally good, and the most that each pretended to was a local authority.

But it may be said, that though these religions do not oblige

us; yet if any of them were true, they effectually overthrow all others; for God cannot contradict himself; and on this ground these several pretences come within our inquiry. This reasoning may be good; but then it goes effectually to exclude all these pretences; for the voice of nature is the voice of God, and therefore cannot be contradicted by God: no revelation therefore can be considered which contradicts any one plain principle of natural religion; and there is not one form of those alluded to, that does not split on this rock: but farther, which of them all so much as pretends to the essentials necessary to constitute a law, human or divine? Take the instance of Rome: what was Numa? a king, and therefore submitted to in religious innovations: but what mark of a divine commission can be produced? Still it may be urged, that the many pretences to inspiration which have been admitted, are so many instances of the inability of men to distinguish between true and false in the present case: how can we trust our judgment, when so many, who thought they acted rationally, have been mistaken! Why, then, should we expose ourselves to almost certain error by following the same steps? Whatever force there is in this argument, it must recoil on natural religion; on many points of which men in all ages have grossly and universally erred: what security have we that we shall not commit the same mistakes? Even the errors of the heathen are chargeable on this blindness and ignorance of nature; had she done her part, men could not have been imposed on by such gross superstitions.

What is it now that discovers to us these impostures, which were not seen before? What, but that true sense of reason and nature which is newly kindled and lighted up in the mind by the gospel? the want of which darkened the old world: it is therefore absurd to suppose that we are in the same danger of being deceived by pretended revelations: for ask any one, who makes this objection, if he thinks

one of the heathen forms of worship could be imposed on himself.

From these pretences, then, let us turn to the true revelations of the same period, and see how far they relate to the present case: those given to particular men on particular occasions are of course omitted: the law of Moses considered: this must be viewed on different principles by the Jews and by us: to them it was given and declared; they are under its obligations; and they are concerned to inquire, not only about the truth of a subsequent revelation, but whether it abrogates their law, or is to subsist with it; as also whether their law has precluded them from receiving any farther revelations. With us the question is, how we are concerned with the law; for it is plain that no revelation can oblige those to whom it is not addressed: and in the very promulgation of the law of Moses we find it confined to the people of Israel—*Hear, O Israel:* and this was known to be the case under the law: Deut. iv. 8. Ps. cxlvii. 19. 20. The law of Moses then has no claim to our obedience, farther than the moral part of it, when understood, will oblige every rational being: this however is not the obligation we are now considering. But the law affords to us abundant evidence for the truth of the gospel.

But what alteration happened after the coming of Christ to unsettle our judgments in this important matter? Many instances of pretenders to revelations in history; but all vanished and were forgotten: the want of general promulgation shows that God had no hand in them, and therefore absurd to instance them.

So the case stood, and the gospel had no competitor till the successful impostor Mahomet arose: he pretended a commission to all the world, found means to publish his pretences, and asserted his authority on the strength of revelation. With respect to this instance, it is not very likely to bias our choice.

Go to natural religion: lay before her Mahomet and his disciples arrayed in armor and blood, &c. Show them to her in their retirement, the slaves of lust, &c., which they justify by a divine commission—then show her the blessed Jesus, humble, and meek, and doing good to all men; injured, but not provoked; and praying for his very enemies in the agony of death: when she has viewed both, ask, which is the prophet of God? But we have already had her answer from the lips of the centurion at the cross—*Truly this man was the Son of God.*

DISCOURSE IX.

JOHN, CHAP. XX.—VERSES 30, 31.

And many other signs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name.

THESE words stand towards the close of St. John's gospel, and are by some thought to be the last of his own writing. They give us an account of the nature of his gospel, and of his end and design in publishing it to the world. The Apostle does not pretend his gospel to be a perfect and complete narrative of all that our Lord did whilst he conversed among men, not even of all the miracles and wonders which he wrought in confirmation of his doctrine: 'Many other signs truly did Jesus—which are not written in this book.' He adds farther, that the signs omitted in his account were done 'in the presence of his disciples,' and were consequently of as good authority as those related by himself. This was but a necessary piece of caution; for St. John wrote his gospel late, towards the end of his life, after the Apostles and disciples of Christ had spread the gospel far and near, and had both by preaching and writing published the great works and signs done by their Master. To prevent therefore the suspicions which some might be apt to entertain of their teachers, when they found the great evidences insisted on by them not mentioned by St. John, who, being the last writer of the Apostles, would naturally, for that reason, be supposed to be the most accurate; he declares that he had not recounted all the signs done by Jesus, but that there were many others, which, having

been wrought in the presence of the disciples, might very well be taught and published by them, though omitted by himself.

But why does St. John, speaking of the miracles of Jesus, take notice only that 'they were done in the presence of the disciples?' whereas in truth they were done in the face of the sun, in the most open and public manner, in the sight of friends and foes; which is so advantageous a circumstance, and which adds so much to the credibility of the signs, that it ought ever to be remembered. St. John knew this very well, having in the course of his gospel often taken notice of this very thing: particularly in the story of Lazarus, he tells us, 'that many Jews were with Martha and Mary to comfort them concerning their brother,' who followed Jesus to the grave, and saw Lazarus come forth to life on his call: 'many of which,' says St. John, chap. xi. 45, 46. 'having seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him: but some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done.' But the reason why this is not insisted on in the text is, that it was not to St. John's purpose: he is there speaking of the authoritative promulgation of the gospel, as is evident from the last verse, 'These things are written that ye might believe:' and this led him no farther than to observe that the preachers and publishers of the gospel were eye-witnesses of the things they attested, and therefore unexceptionable witnesses. This is the true foundation of the Apostles' authority considered as promulgers of Christianity; which depended on what they themselves had seen or heard, and not on what others had seen or heard, whether friends or foes. Other circumstances may be good collateral evidence; but the testimony of the Apostles rests on this, that they themselves saw and heard what they have reported. And therefore the same Apostle in his first Epistle sets forth this evidence in the very same manner: 'That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked on, and our hands have handled, of the word of life—that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us.'

You have also the reason assigned which moved St. John to publish his gospel, which extends likewise to all the other writ-

ings of the New Testament: 'But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, and that believing ye might have life through his name.' This reason is not so strictly to be urged, as if writing were the only way of publishing the gospel, which we know was effectually published to great multitudes, before any book of the New Testament was written, by the preaching and working of the Apostles. But thus far perhaps we may justly argue, that writing is the best, if not the only method of perpetuating the testimony, and delivering down the doctrines of Christ uncorrupted to distant ages: and this way has had the consent and approbation of all civilized nations; from whence it is that *scripta lex* is used in the best writers to signify an instituted law, as distinguished from the law of nature arising either from instinct or reason.

The gospels then were published that they might be a standing evidence to all ages of God's purpose to redeem the world by sending his Son to take our nature on him, 'that he might die for our sins, and rise again for our justification:' and it was absolutely necessary to convey this knowlege to the world by a proper authority; for revelation cannot obtain the force and authority of law, or any way oblige the consciences of men, till it be sufficiently published and declared. This is universally true of all laws whatever, both human and divine: and the reason of it is plain; because otherwise men would be bound to an impossibility, to obey a law before they knew what the law was. For the same reason also it must be allowed, that the promulgation of the law is the proper care and concern of the lawgiver: for the law must come from the governor to the governed; and the subject, till he knows the law, that is, till it is promulged and sufficiently declared to him, can have no concern in it. Apply this to revelation, and you will perceive that it is absurd to suppose that God has given any law to the world which he has not sufficiently promulged and declared; for that would be to suppose that God intended to give, and not to give, a law to mankind at the same time. An insufficient promulgation is no promulgation; and therefore all powers and qualities necessary to give credit and authority to the publishers of a revelation are always supposed, when we speak of the truth and authority of revelation. God may reveal what he sees fit

to one or two or more men; but unless such men are commissioned and duly qualified to satisfy others that such things have been made known to them, others are no more concerned in the revelation than if it had never been made. It would take up too much of your time to inquire particularly what are the necessary qualifications to constitute a proper witness to revelation. It may suffice to observe, that no man is naturally qualified for it, for this plain reason, because all natural qualifications are easily counterfeited to serve a purpose. Honesty, sincerity, and religion, may be put on in appearance; and a man may bear himself so well in the disguise, as not to be discovered. Things in common life are easily believed on the report of honest men: but then it must be considered that the moral probability of such things goes a great way in rendering them credible. It is no shock to our minds to believe that such a thing happened at such a time, which we know often does happen in the course of things, and probably might happen then. In such cases a small weight inclines the mind to assent: but it requires other kind of evidence to make the mind submit to the belief of things which are supported by no moral probability, but are quite out of the ordinary course and nature of things. This shows that no revelation can be sufficiently promulged and declared to the world by men, unless they are extraordinarily qualified and commissioned to that purpose. We do not therefore rely merely on the honesty or moral character of the first preachers of the gospel, but on their authority proved and supported by many wonderful works which God enabled them to do, and on their integrity sufficiently established by what they did and suffered for the sake of the gospel.

But here the question is asked, How shall we distinguish between the pretences to revelation, which are so many and various, all of which have an equal right to be heard, that it is endless to look for religion in such a crowd of pretenders to it, and difficult to determine the merit of the several claims? So that the only sure way is to take up with natural religion, which is every where uniformly the same, and in which there is no danger of being deluded and misled by imposture: for natural religion admits of no counterfeit: and since every man's reason is judge in this case, no man can be cheated but by himself;

and all men are so much their own friends, that in a matter of so great moment, which so nearly concerns their present and their future happiness, they may securely trust themselves.

Now, to form a true judgment upon this case, it will be necessary first to state the question right on the foot of this objection, and then to examine what weight of reason there is in it.

First then, The question must relate to revelation, considered only as the rule and measure of religion: for the dispute between nature and revelation is confined to this one point, which is the best and safest guide in religion? It is absurd therefore to bring instances of any revelations in this case, which do not pretend to this property, that were never given, or pretended to be given, as a rule of religion: for when men talk of the various revelations that have been in the world, and the difficulty of determining which they ought to obey, they cannot take into their consideration the answer of the oracle to Crœsus, or the several other answers on particular occasions recorded in the Greek and Roman histories, nor yet the particular messages which God sent by the hands of different prophets to the people of Israel; for these revelations, whether true or false, being confined to particular occasions, are out of the present question, and have no relation to the inquiry concerning a rule or measure of religion. This observation will in a great measure overthrow the truth of the fact on which the objection is built; for on this view there are not many revelations that can come into competition: in the heathen world I know of none; for though there were sundry pretences to revelation, yet none was set up as a common standard for the religion of mankind. The religion of Rome was chiefly introduced by Numa, who pretended a revelation for the foundation of his authority: but it is plain he aimed at nothing farther than modelling the religion of his city, and had no thought of the rest of the world in what he did. Nor had the Romans any sense that their religion concerned any but themselves: and therefore, when they extended their conquests, religion was their least concern; they left the world in that respect as they found it, and men were not so much as invited to take their religion. Now it is evident that no law, either human or divine, extends farther than the law-

giver intends. Suppose then, if you please, Numa's religion to be a revelation; yet since it was given and declared only to the people of Rome, the rest of the world can have no concern in it. That no system of religion in the heathen world claimed as a general law, is evident from the answer returned by the oracle, when the inquiry was, which religion was best? The answer was, that every man should worship according to the custom of the country where he was. So that all religions were esteemed equally good, and the most any religion pretended to was a local authority, which reached no farther than the laws of the country did: and unless men are for giving more to the pretended heathen revelations than ever they claimed for themselves, or was claimed for them by those who introduced them and lived under them, they cannot be brought into this question, since they have no relation to us, any more than the many civil laws and constitutions of the same countries had: and men may as reasonably complain of the great variety of civil and municipal laws that distract their obedience, and then instance in the laws of the Medes and Persians, as they now complain of the variety of revelations, instancing in such as, if they were true, concern them as little as the laws of Persia do.

But perhaps it will be said, that though these religions do not oblige us, yet nevertheless, if any of them were true, they effectually overthrow all others; for God cannot contradict himself, whether he speaks to one nation or to all the world: and on this foot these several pretences come within our inquiry. This reasoning may be good; but then it does most effectually exclude all these pretences: for the voice of nature is the voice of God, and therefore cannot be contradicted by God. No revelation therefore can entitle itself to be considered, if it contradicts any one plain principle of natural religion: and there is not any one form of religion within the period mentioned that does not split on this rock; and therefore there is no danger of your being oppressed with labor and study in examining their several claims.

But farther; Which of them all so much as pretends to the essentials necessary to constitute a law, either human or divine? Where was it published and declared? by whom, and how qualified? Can you name the persons, or produce the gospel of

such religion? Take the instance of Rome: what was Numa? a king, and therefore submitted to in the innovations of religion. But what one mark of a divine commission can you produce? and yet without such marks even a true revelation could be of no authority. Try all other instances, and you will still see how weakly the objection against revelation is supported by any pretences of the heathen world.

But still it will be urged that the many pretences to inspiration, which have been received and admitted, are so many instances of the weakness of men, and their inability to distinguish between true and false in the present case. And how can we ever trust ourselves in examining revelation, and be secure in our judgment, when we see all the world has erred before us, and men wise as ourselves, who thought too, it may be, that they acted as rationally as we do, mistaken in every instance of this kind? Is it not easily supposed that the world is misled now, as formerly it has been? Why then should we expose ourselves to almost certain error by following the same steps, and pursue those principles which have never yet produced aught but deceit and falsehood? Whatever force there is in this argument, it must recoil on the cause of natural religion; for certain it is from the history of all ages, both past and present, that men have erred grossly and universally in many principal points of natural religion. How then shall we ever trust ourselves in examining the dictates of nature, since the attempt has in all ages produced folly, ignorance, and superstition? What security have we that we shall not follow our forefathers in all their errors and mistakes, if we guide ourselves by the same clue of thread which directed them? Nay, in truth, the errors and superstitions of the heathen world, even those which pretended to derive themselves from oracles and revelations of the gods, are chargeable on this blindness and ignorance of nature. Had nature but done her part, men could not have been imposed on by such gross and palpable superstition: had the natural notion of the Deity been preserved intire and uncorrupted, no one form of the heathen worship could have stood before it; but they must have all dispersed, as the clouds fleet away before the sun.

What is it now that discovers to you these impostures, which

were not seen by those before you? Is it not manifestly that true sense of reason and nature, which hath been new kindled and lighted up in the mind of man by the gospel of Christ? Was it not then the want of this sense that darkened the old world? But be the cause what it will, if you judge rightly in supposing yourself able now to discern the dictates of reason and nature, without which you ought not to pretend even to natural religion, it is absurd to pretend that you are in the same danger of being deceived by pretended revelations as the old world was, since you have, and claim to have, that light, the want of which was the very thing that exposed them to all their errors and superstitions. And to show that this objection is a mere feint, ask any one who makes it, whether he thinks any man could impose one of the heathen forms of worship, or any thing like it, on him? No man, I believe, but would be angry to be suspected of so much weakness. Yet these very forms were imposed on your forefathers; and you are confident, and with good reason, that they cannot be imposed on you. It is evident, then, that you are not in the same case with them, that their danger is not your danger; and, consequently, their errors about revelation is no objection against hearkening to revelation now, when we know ourselves effectually secured against their errors.

From these pretences let us turn to view the true revelations belonging to the same period, and see how far they relate to the present case. Those given to particular men on particular occasions are out of the question, for reasons already mentioned.

The law of Moses was published and declared with great solemnity, and by persons every way qualified: it contains a rule or system of religion, and is still maintained by its disciples in opposition to the gospel. Here then perhaps may seem to be some difficulty, when two revelations, that have equal pleas to truth, are set in competition one against the other. This question must be argued on different principles with Jews and with other men; for the law was given and declared to the Jews, and they were under the obligations of it: they therefore are concerned to inquire, not only of the truth of a subsequent revelation, but also whether it does sufficiently

abrogate their law, or whether it is to subsist with it; as likewise whether their law has any where precluded them from admitting any farther revelations. But to us the question is, how we are concerned with the law, and whether there can be any competition with respect to us between the law and the gospel. From the principles already mentioned we may soon determine this question; for it is plain that no revelation can oblige those to whom it is not given; that promulgation is so far of the essence of the law, that no man in reason or equity owes any obligation to a law till it is made known to him; that the obligations therefore of a law are limited by the terms of the promulgation. Apply this to the law of Moses; you will find that law in the very promulgation of it confined to the people of Israel: 'Hear, O Israel!' is the introduction to the promulgation; which it could not have been, had the law been designed for the whole world. And this was known to be the case under the law. Moses, who best understood the extent of his own commission, says thus to the people of Israel: 'What nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?' Deut. iv. 8. The holy Psalmist expresses the same sense in these words: 'He showeth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation; and as for his judgments, they have not known them:' Psal. cxlvii. 19, 20. From all which it is evident that the law of Moses has no claim to our obedience. The moral part of the law, when understood, will oblige every rational creature; but this is not the obligation we are now speaking of. The law of Moses then cannot add to the number of revelations which create us any difficulty in determining ourselves; for, let the case happen as it will, we are free from the law. But the law affords even to us abundant evidence for the truth of the gospel. The proofs from prophecy are as convincing to us as to the Jews; for it matters not whether we are under the law or not under the law, since conviction in this case arises from another and different principle. But I hasten to a conclusion.

Let us then consider briefly, what alteration has happened since the coming of Christ to disturb and unsettle our judg-

ments in this great affair. A man perhaps, who is a great reader, may be able to produce many instances of impostors since that time, and imagine that they are all so many dead weights on the cause of revelation; but what is become of them and their doctrines? they are vanished, and their place is not to be found. What pretence is there then to set up these revelations? Is God grown so weak and impotent, that we may suppose these to be his revelations, and intended for the use of the world, had he not been baffled at first setting out? If God intends a law for the use of the world, he is obliged, if I may use the expression, to publish the law to the world; and therefore want of such publication evidently shows that God was not concerned in them, or at least did not intend that we should be concerned in them; and therefore it is absurd to instance in such pretences as difficulties in our way, which in truth are not in our way at all.

And thus the case of revelation stood, and the gospel had no competitor, till the great and successful impostor Mahomet arose: he indeed pretends a commission to all the world, and found means sufficiently to publish his pretences. He asserts his authority on the strength of revelation, and endeavors to transfer the advantages of the gospel evidence to himself, having that pattern before him to copy after: and should we say that the Alcoran was never promulgated to us by persons duly commissioned, it may be answered perhaps, that the Alcoran is as well published to us as the gospel is to them; which has some appearance of an answer, though the fact is indeed otherwise; for even the Alcoran owns Jesus for a true prophet.

But with respect to this instance, I persuade myself it can be no very distracting study to find reasons to determine our choice. Go to your natural religion; lay before her Mahomet and his disciples arrayed in armor and in blood, riding in triumph over the spoils of thousands and tens of thousands, who fell by his victorious sword: show her the cities which he set in flames, the countries which he ravaged and destroyed, and the miserable distress of all the inhabitants of the earth. When she has viewed him in this scene, carry her into his retirements: show her the prophet's chamber, his concubines and wives; let her see his adultery, and hear him allege revelation and his divine

commission to justify his lust and his oppression. When she is tired with this prospect, then show her the blessed Jesus, humble and meek, doing good to all the sons of men, patiently instructing both the ignorant and the perverse. Let her see him in his most retired privacies; let her follow him to the mount, and hear his devotions and supplications to God. Carry her to his table to view his poor fare, and hear his heavenly discourse. Let her see him injured, but not provoked: let her attend him to the tribunal, and consider the patience with which he endured the scoffs and reproaches of his enemies. Lead her to his cross; and let her view him in the agony of death, and hear his last prayer for his persecutors: 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!'

When natural religion has viewed both, ask, Which is the prophet of God? But her answer we have already had; when she saw part of this scene through the eyes of the centurion who attended at the cross; by him she spoke and said, 'Truly this man was the Son of God.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE X.

ACTS, CHAP. II.—VERSE 22.

THE great evidence of Christianity lies in the miracles done to confirm the authority and commission of Jesus. This the only reasonable evidence of his coming from God; see John xv. 24.; without this undeniable proof, men would have been acquitted for not believing him, see John x. 37. Christ refers the messengers, whom John sent, to the works which he did.

The truth of Christianity, therefore, resting on miracles, it is shown—

I. Wherein the true force of this argument from miracles consists, and what it is they prove.

II. What sort of works are to be admitted for miracles, in proving the truth of any religion.

First: Miracles are not intended to prove the being of a God, nor the doctrines of morality; inasmuch as natural religion has for its evidence the works of nature; and in the most degenerate times God did not leave himself without witness, &c. No revelation can bring greater works to prove its authority, than those by which the clear dictates of natural religion are proved; nor is there any other distinction between miracles and the works of nature than this, that the latter are works of great power *constantly* produced, the former are such wrought in an unusual way. Hence, no revelation can contradict or make void any clear dictate of natural religion; and therefore the principles of natural religion must be supposed from the foundation of revealed, as in Heb. ii. 6.

But to ascertain the use of miracles we must consider when

and why they were introduced. In early times we meet with none; for there was no occasion for them while men preserved a right notion of God; were acquainted, as it were, with him; and knew his voice when he spoke. But when idolatry prevailed, and every nation had its deity, to whom it gave the name of god, then it was necessary, for the preservation of true religion, to distinguish between the true God and pretended ones. Then God thought proper to show his superiority over the heathen deities, and to assume a character of distinction by his mighty works. The first miracles of which we have any account, were those wrought in Egypt, at which time God declared himself to be the God of the Hebrews. The question arises, Why did he, who is the God of *all the world*, so style himself? To account for this, the state of religion in the world at that time must be considered. All the nations of the earth had at that time their local deities. Here the question was between God under the character of God of the Hebrews, and that of God of the Egyptians, which of them was supreme; and this could only be determined by a superiority of power shown in miracles; and those wrought by Moses were such as plainly pointed out the hand of the Almighty Creator. But the purpose of God in sending Moses to show his wonders in Egypt, was not only to deliver the Hebrews, but to make his name known over all nations. Egypt was a *great* country, *notorious* for idolatry, from whence the infection spread to others: hence the properest scene on which God could exert his power for the conviction of all people. And the miracles wrought there were such as all the world had a concern in, being so near akin to the works of creation, that by a just comparison they might be known to come from the same hand; for who but the Author of Nature could stir up things animate and inanimate to punish offenders? Did not God, by these signs, speak plainly to them and say, 'See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no God with me: I kill, and I make alive,' &c.

Deut. xxxii. 39. This use of miracles appears throughout the history of the Jews: instanced in the contest of Elijah and the priests of Baal, 1 Kings xviii. 21. The case of the destruction of the Assyrian army in the reign of Hezekiah, seems to carry with it a severity hard to be accounted for; since other princes had laid siege to Jerusalem without incurring so terrible a calamity. But Sennacherib sent a defiance to God, and boasted of victories obtained against him: he acted like Pharaoh, and suffered like him; being made an example to show the supremacy of God to all nations. This indeed appears to be the first and original use of miracles. The miracles of the magicians shown to have added to, rather than detracted from, the authority of the works done by Moses.

With respect to the Jews, miracles had a double use. By their long continuance in Egypt they became infected with idolatry, so that they wanted a proof that the God of their fathers was the Supreme Being, as much as the Egyptians themselves; thus Ezekiel xx. 5. &c. But there was also a use of miracles peculiar to them, in which the Egyptians had no concern: Moses was sent, not only to be their deliverer, but their lawgiver. The Jews were called out of Egypt to be the peculiar people of God, under a new covenant, &c. for which Moses could give them no assurance but by the evidence of works, which plainly appeared to come from the hand of God.

The Jewish government, being a theocracy, leads us to expect a series of miracles in its administration: and such was the case; and these were constant and standing proofs to them, and to the nations around, that their God was the Lord. But Moses had no successor as a lawgiver, until the great Prophet, like unto Moses, came, in the full power and authority of God, to make a new covenant, not with one people, but with all nations; *Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God by miracles*, &c.

As before observed, the great doctrines of natural religion have for evidence the works of nature, and want not the support of miracles. But when any new doctrine, of which nature has given no notice, is published, such must be established by new proofs. Reason, indeed, shows that God is to be trusted and obeyed in what he promises or commands; but still a proof is required, that such promises or commands do come from him: hence miracles necessary to the introduction of a new revelation. Miracles do not prove the truth of any doctrine, but that the commission of him who does them, comes from him by whose power alone they could be performed. The law of Moses requiring submission to commands and doctrines that are not established by the light of nature, it was necessary to found them on the authority of God, to which no submission could be due till sufficient evidence was given of it, to guard men from imposition, &c.; and whoever considers of what consequence it was to mankind to have a standing evidence of the unity and supremacy of God manifested in his government of the Jews, and how the Mosaic Dispensation prepared the way for the salvation of the world by the gospel, will see reason to think that the end proposed was worthy of God, and that his acts herein were not only those of power, but of great benevolence.

The miracles of the gospel had the same, or a greater end in view. As Moses overcame the magicians of Egypt, and their false gods, our Saviour destroyed the power of Satan and wicked spirits, and idolatrous rites. If Moses had a divine commission to the Jews, Jesus had a more ample one, to publish salvation to all mankind; and as the terms of it were such as human wisdom could never suggest, hence the necessity of miracles.

No miracles can alter the clear dictates of natural religion; and such is the case also with respect to any former divine revelation: admitting therefore the Mosaic and Christian revelation to be both divine, they must be consistent, each in its pro-

per place carrying on the views of Providence: this evidently was the case of Moses; and to this purpose are the words of our Saviour, Matthew v. 17. 18.: he also constantly appealed to the Law and the Prophets: so also St. Paul before Agrippa, Acts xxvi. 22. Indeed one revelation admitted to be of divine authority, must be a touchstone to try all succeeding revelations; for God cannot contradict himself: the miracles of Moses and our Saviour not only prove their divine authority, but are a bar to all succeeding pretenders. The miracles reported to have been done in the heathen world are unworthy of God, who does not work miracles merely to astonish men, but to serve the great ends of Providence; and he did not rest the authority of his law on one or more single miracles, but on a long series; and if miracles are properly applied as a proof of God's will, then such as are wrought without any declaration of his will, in which we have any concern, are not to be set up in opposition to those of Moses and Christ, which involve the happiness of mankind here and hereafter. Miracles worked for the establishment of the gospel, compared with the pretended ones of the heathen.

Some miracles mentioned in the Old Testament as wrought in behalf of particular people and for particular purposes, though of divine authority, not to be set in competition with those of the gospel; they are to be considered merely as acts of God's government in his capacity of King of Israel.

Secondly, it is considered what sort of works are to be admitted for miracles, in proving the truth of a religion.

The first inquiry is, whether the miracles might not proceed from human art or cunning; but it scarcely can be necessary to prove that such miracles as raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, &c. exceed the power of man. But perhaps they were not done, and were only false appearances; as when the man born blind was restored to sight, he did not recover his

eyes, but the people lost theirs: now this would have been the greater miracle of the two.

But must they of necessity proceed from God, because they could not be wrought by men? Is there no order of beings capable of performing them? Can we safely say that no being but the All-wise and Almighty God could perform them, seeing that neither the miracles of the gospel, nor the works of nature, directly prove an infinite power or wisdom?

This matter rightly stated: the works of nature, though they may not appear works of an infinite power, do prove an all-powerful cause, or the being of a God, because they of necessity prove a first cause of all things; which cause being unlimited, nothing is or can be done which it cannot do. It must then be remembered that a revelation is not introduced to prove the being of a God; that our Saviour's miracles were not wrought for that purpose; but supposing the being of a God, to prove him the author of the revelation: if then as good arguments be brought to prove God the author of the revelation, as can be brought to prove his being, all who believe the one must believe the other. The miracles of the gospel examined in this point of view, and shown to prove—first, that God is the maker of the world: secondly, that he is the governor of it: thirdly, that he has the essential attributes of justice, righteousness, holiness, and goodness.

But it is asked, how do we know that the miracles of the gospel did not proceed from an evil power, since there are instances, as some think, of miracles so wrought? This question answered: we know it in the same way that any man knows the works of nature to proceed from a good being: the love of virtue, and hatred of vice, is as inseparable from the gospel of Christ as from the reason of man; and the former more distinctly teaches us to know and acknowlege the holiness and goodness of God, than reason or the works of

nature can do. But this, it is said, is to argue in a circle, is to prove the doctrines first by miracles, and then the miracles by the doctrines: the objection a mistake, which lies in this; that men do not distinguish between the doctrines *proved* by miracles, and the doctrines by which miracles *are tried;* for they are not the same. God never wrought miracles to prove the difference between good and evil: this existed and was known before the gospel; but the doctrines proved by miracles are the new revealed doctrines of Christianity, unknown to and undiscoverable by man's reason. Concluding exhortation to those who hold fast and admire the principles of natural religion, but despise or overlook the proofs of Christianity: the same reasons which oblige them to believe in God, oblige them to believe in Christ also.

DISCOURSE X.

ACTS, CHAP. II.—VERSE 22.

Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.

THE great evidence of Christianity, to which our Saviour and his Apostles constantly appeal, are the miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by the hand of Jesus to confirm the authority and commission he gave him to publish and declare his will to the world. This being the only reasonable evidence that he could give of his coming from God, our Saviour says expressly, 'If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin:' John xv. 24. If he had not given these undeniable proofs of his being a teacher sent from God, they would have been acquitted, not only in reason, but even out of his own mouth. 'If I do not the works of my Father,' says he, 'believe me not:' John x. 37. 'If I bear witness of myself, my witness is not true:' John v. 31. and he adds, verse 36, 'The works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father sent me.' Thus, when St. John sent to him to inquire expressly whether he was the Christ or no, he showed the messengers his works, and bade them relate to John what they had seen; referring it to him to judge by his works, which were the only proper evidence, whether he was the Christ or no.

The truth then of Christianity resting on the authority of miracles, I shall endeavor in the following discourse to show,

First, Wherein the true force of this argument from miracles consists, and what it is that they prove.

Secondly, What sort of works are to be admitted for miracles in proving the truth of any religion.

First, I shall endeavor to show wherein the true force of this argument from miracles consists, or what it is that they prove.

Miracles are not intended to prove the being of God, nor the doctrines of morality; for natural religion is supported by natural reason, and has for its evidence the works of nature. Thus St. Paul argues in his first chapter to the Romans, declaring that what was to be known of God was manifest to men, God having showed it unto them: 'For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead.' And in the most corrupt and degenerate times God did not leave himself without witness, continuing to do good, to give rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, filling the hearts of men with joy and gladness. These are the standing proofs of the being and goodness of God; and men need but open their eyes, and look round them, to see the wonderful and stupendous works of nature, which lead directly to the knowlege of God. And what greater evidence can man have than this? for if the making one world will not prove the being of a God, the making of ten thousand will not. And therefore this is a principle of religion not learnt from revelation, but which is always supposed as the foundation of revelation; for no revelation can bring greater works to prove its authority, than the works by which the clear and unexceptionable dictates of natural religion are proved; for the distinction between miracles and works of nature is no more than this, that works of nature are works of great power, produced constantly and in a regular course, which course we call nature; that miracles are works of great power also, wrought in an unusual way: but they are both considered in the same light, and with equal advantage, as effects leading to the knowlege of a great though invisible power. Thus we must acknowlege great power to be shown in the sun's constant rising and setting; and as great in his standing still, should we see him stopped in his course for the space of a whole day. That we have all eyes to see, and ears to hear, is an effect of

as great power, as giving sight to one born blind, or hearing to one born deaf. On this account it is impossible that any true revelation should contradict or evacuate any clear dictate of natural religion, which stands at least on as good a bottom as any revelation can do. And therefore the principles of natural religion must be supposed for the foundation of revealed; which is intimated by the writer to the Hebrews: 'He that comes to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him;' that is, he must bring this belief with him; for a revelation is not to prove the being of a God, or that he loves virtue, and hates vice. God never wrought miracles for this purpose, having sufficiently evidenced himself from the beginning of the world by the visible things of the creation; and had any one asked our Saviour to show a proof that there was a God, I am apt to imagine he would have turned him over to the works of nature, as he did the rich man's brethren to Moses and the prophets for a proof of a future state.

But to ascertain the use of miracles, it will be proper to consider when and for what purpose they were introduced. In early times we meet with none; nor was there any occasion for them, so long as men preserved a right notion of God as Maker and absolute Lord of the universe, and were acquainted with him (I had almost said, personally acquainted with him) and knew his voice when he spoke to them; for so long they received his commands without doubt or hesitation; and being perfectly satisfied that the command came from God, what weight or authority could the multiplying of signs and wonders add to their persuasion? for signs and wonders could only show that the command came from God, to whom all nature obeyed and was subject; and as they wanted no such proof, there was no room or occasion for the introducing of miracles.

But when idolatry prevailed in the world, and every nation had its peculiar deity, to whom they gave the name of God, it became necessary, in order to preserve true religion in the world, to distinguish between the true God and the pretended deities adored by the heathen. The great works of the creation were standing proofs of the being of a God, and common to all nations; and therefore the belief of a Deity was the common

persuasion of the world; for though men in general were become idolaters, yet they were not atheists; but then the true God was forgotten, or almost lost in the multiplicity of false gods, to whom the blindness of the world ascribed the honor and power due to the one Supreme only.

In this state of things God thought proper to exert himself in such acts of power as should demonstrate his superiority above all gods of the heathen, and to assume a character of distinction, that the hand might be certainly known from which the mighty works proceeded: and it is very observable that God did publicly assume such a character and work miracles, at one and the same time. The first miracles of which we have any account, were those wrought by Moses in Egypt; and at the same time God declared himself to be the God of the Hebrews. And this was the first declaration of himself to the world under such a character: for we do not read he ever styled himself the God of Noah, or the God of Shem, or of any other person, till after the call of Abraham; for to him he appeared at first, and said, 'I am the Almighty God:' Gen. xvii. 1. And though in the family of Abraham he was known by the name of the God of Abraham, yet was not that relation understood in the world, till Moses had express command to make it known to Pharaoh and his people. And the accuracy with which the message was delivered, is observable; for though God commanded Moses in speaking to the children of Israel to say, 'The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me;' yet in speaking to the king of Egypt, who probably might know little of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, his orders are to say, 'The God of the Hebrews hath met us,' &c. Exod. iii. 15, 18, and v. 3.

It may appear strange to us to hear the God, the Creator of heaven and earth, assuming to himself a character that seems to limit the right of his dominion; for why does he, who is God of all the world, style himself 'the God of the Hebrews?' Is he not the God of all nations? Or why does he appeal to miracles wrought under the character of God of the Hebrews, when the great works of the creation (of all miracles the

greatest) are a constant and perpetual evidence of his almighty power and universal dominion?

To account for this, you must consider the state of religion in the world at the time when God assumed this character, and sent Moses to show signs and wonders in the land of Egypt. All the nations of the earth had at that time their several local deities; and as every nation is naturally inclined to think their own the best, a message delivered in the name of the deity of any one people could have no effect on another. And therefore, when Moses delivered a message to Pharaoh in the name of the God of Israel, Pharaoh's answer was, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the Lord; neither will I let Israel go:' Exod. v. 2. Now the way which God made choice of to convince Pharaoh was, 'by multiplying signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, that the Egyptians might know that he was the Lord, when he stretched forth his hand on Egypt:' Exod. vii. 3, 5.

Here the question plainly was between God under the character of the God of the Hebrews, and the god of the Egyptians, which of them was supreme: and this point could only be determined by a superiority of power shown in miracles. And if we attend to the nature of the miracles wrought by Moses, they will appear to be such as plainly pointed out the hand of the almighty Creator. The author of the book of Wisdom tells us, 'that the Egyptians, being deceived by the foolish devices of their wickedness, worshipped serpents void of reason:' Wisd. xi. 15. And the most ancient account we have of that people from profane history confirms the observation. And therefore the first miracle performed by Moses was a direct conquest over the deities of Pharaoh: for when his rod was changed into a serpent, and devoured all the serpents produced by the magicians, what could Pharaoh reasonably conclude, but that the God in whose name Moses spoke, was 'God of gods, and Lord of lords?' And when the magicians were compelled to acknowlege the divine power of Moses, and openly to declare to Pharaoh that the finger of God was in it, one would imagine that this triumph over the deities and magicians of Egypt should have furnished a complete

answer to that demand of Pharaoh, 'Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice?' But he continued obstinate.

But the purpose of God in sending Moses to show his wonders in the land of Egypt, was intended not only for the deliverance of the Hebrews, but to make his name known over all the nations of the earth: for as Egypt was at that time a great and florishing kingdom, and was notoriously the seat of superstition and idolatry, from whence the infection spread to all the nations round about, it was of all others the properest scene for God to exert his power and authority for the conviction of all people. And for this reason God had connived at the wickedness and idolatry of Egypt, and suffered the kingdom to grow very great, that their punishment might be the more exemplary: 'In very deed for this cause have I raised thee up, for to show in thee my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth:' Exod. ix. 16.

The miracles wrought in Egypt were such as all the world had a concern in: for they were so near akin to the works of the creation, that by a just comparison they might be known to come from the same hand: for who but the Author of nature could stir up things animate and inanimate to punish offenders? When God slew all the first-born in Egypt in one night, and preserved the people of Israel in safety; when he led the people of Israel through the Red Sea by commanding the waters to open them a passage, and drowned Pharaoh and all his host by bringing the waters back on them; did not God by these signs plainly speak to them, and say, 'See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand'? Deut. xxxii. 39.

This use of miracles appears throughout the history of the Jews. Thus, in the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal, the Prophet laid before the people this choice; 'If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him:' 1 Kings xviii. 21. The people were silent: the dispute was referred to be determined by signs and wonders: and when the people saw the hand of God made manifest, they fell on their

faces, and said, 'The Lord, he is the God! the Lord, he is the God!' verse 39.

The case of the destruction of the army of the Assyrians in the reign of Hezekiah, when a hundred and fourscore and five thousand men were destroyed in one night by the angel of God, seems to carry with it a severity hard to be accounted for. The king of Assyria with his great host laid siege to Jerusalem; and so had other princes done without falling under so great calamity: but the case of Sennacherib has this peculiar in it, that he sent a defiance to God, and boasted himself of many victories obtained against him. Hear the message he sent to Hezekiah: 'Thus saith the great king, the king of Assyria, What confidence is this wherein thou trustest? Hearken not unto Hezekiah: for thus saith the king of Assyria, Hath any of the gods of the nations delivered at all his land out of the hand of the king of Assyria? Who are they, among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of my hand, that the Lord should deliver Jerusalem out of my hand?' 2 Kings xviii. You see here the king of Assyria acting the same part with the king of Egypt; and if his power was broken all at once, he suffered but in the same way that the king of Egypt did; and this judgment was brought on him with the same view, to make him an example, and to vindicate and assert the supremacy of God in the eyes of all the nations.

This appears to be the first and original use of miracles, and they are an immediate and direct proof of what they are brought to assert, the supremacy of God. For when the single question is, who is the mightiest, must it not be decided in his favor who visibly exerts the greatest acts of power? In this case no difficulty can arise from the supposition that other beings as well as God are able to work miracles. The miracles performed by the magicians in Egypt were so far from lessening the authority of the works done by Moses, that they added to it: for the greater the powers were which God humbled and subdued, the greater evidence did he give of his own superiority. So that, whether you suppose that evil spirits have natural powers to do such and the like works, or are sometimes

employed and permitted by God, for the punishment of men, to deceive them by such appearances, in both cases they are equally subject to the power of God.

With respect to the people of the Jews, miracles had a double use; for by their long continuance in Egypt they became infected with the errors and superstitions of the country, and served their idols. So that they wanted a proof that the God of their fathers was indeed the supreme Being, as much as the Egyptians themselves. Thus the Prophet Ezekiel says in the name of God, 'In the day when I chose Israel, and lifted up mine hand unto the seed of the house of Jacob, and made myself known unto them in the land of Egypt, when I lifted up mine hand unto them, saying, I am the Lord your God;—then said I unto them, Cast ye away every man the abominations of his eyes, and defile not yourselves with the idols of Egypt: I am the Lord your God. But they rebelled against me;—they did not cast away the abominations of their eyes, neither did they forsake the idols of Egypt:' Ezek. xx. 5. &c. Which account given by the Prophet shows plainly their corrupt state in Egypt; which was not easily worn off, as appears from their frequent acts of disobedience in their passage through the wilderness, and their great propensity to fall back into idolatry; so that God was frequently provoked to destroy them; and had they been chosen for their own sake, they would have been destroyed: but God having made choice of them to be his own peculiar people, and intending to manifest himself to the heathen world by the protection of that people, 'he saved them for his own name's sake:' which is the account the Prophet Ezekiel gives, speaking in the name of God, 'I said, I will pour out my fury on them, to accomplish my anger against them in the midst of the land of Egypt. But I wrought for my name's sake, that it should not be polluted before the heathen, among whom they were, in whose sight I made myself known unto them, in bringing them forth out of the land of Egypt:' verse 8, 9.

But there was another use of miracles peculiar to the Jews, in which the Egyptians had no concern: for Moses was sent not only to be their deliverer, but also to be their lawgiver. With the Egyptians he had no covenant to make, nor new sta-

tutes to give: he required of Pharaoh to let the children of Israel go; which in justice and equity he ought to have done, considering how his country had been saved by one of that family, and how highly he offended against the laws of hospitality by detaining them as slaves, who came into his country on the hopes and promise of protection. But the Jews were called out of Egypt to be the peculiar people of God, and to be put under a new covenant and new laws, under the immediate government of God; blessings which they had no right to expect, and for the accomplishment of which Moses could give them no assurance, but by the evidence of such works as plainly proceeded from the hand of God, and proved the commission which Moses had to speak in his name.

The Jewish government, being a theocracy, leads us to expect a series of miracles in the administration by the immediate hand of Providence; and so indeed we find the case to be: and the wonderful preservation of that people, when obedient, and the as wonderful punishments, when they were disobedient, were standing proofs to themselves, and to all the nations round about them, that their God was the only Lord and Governor of the world. But Moses had no successor as a lawgiver: prophets and righteous men were often sent by God to reprove and admonish the people for their manifold transgressions of the law given by Moses, but without any authority to add to, or diminish from it. And so the case stood, till the great Prophet, like unto Moses, came in the full power and authority of God to make a new covenant, not with one people, but with all the nations of the earth, 'Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God by miracles and wonders and signs.'

It has been before observed that the great doctrines of natural religion have for their evidence the works of nature, and want not the support of miracles. But when any new doctrine is published to the world, or any new command, of which nature has given no notice, it is of necessity that such new doctrines should be established by new proofs. One thing indeed we learn from natural reason, that God is to be trusted and obeyed in whatever he promises or commands: but still a proof is required, that such new doctrine or command does

really proceed from God. And this shows how necessary miracles are to the introduction of a new revelation: not that miracles can prove the truth of any doctrine; but they directly prove the commission of the person who does them, to proceed from him by whose power alone they could be performed. This distinction between miracles considered as a proof of the doctrine, and as confirming the authority and commission of the person who reveals it, will plainly appear, on considering what the case would be should any man openly perform unquestionable miracles, and then retire in silence, without declaring any purpose he had: the great works might astonish and confound us; but we could not possibly make any use of them: we might indeed conclude that some great and invisible power assisted and enabled the man to perform the works; but what that invisible power had to do with us, or we with it, we could by no just inference conclude. But should such a man declare himself to be a messenger from God commissioned to publish his will to the world, and appeal to the great works which he did as a proof of the authority he had received; the miracles, though, considered in themselves, they do not directly prove his doctrine, yet do they establish his authority, and give the force of a divine command to what he publishes in God's name.

The law of Moses then requiring submission and obedience to commands and doctrines which have no establishment in the light of reason and nature, it was necessary to found them on the authority of God, to which no submission could be due till sufficient evidence was given of it, to guard men against imposition and deceit either from wicked men or wicked spirits: and this made miracles to be a necessary proof in the establishment of a new revelation.

We see then to what purposes miracles were originally introduced, and in what manner applied by Moses: and whoever considers of what consequence it was to the happiness of mankind to have a standing evidence always before their eyes of the unity and supremacy of God manifested in his government of the Jewish nation, and how far the Mosaic dispensation prepared the way, and laid the foundation, for the accomplishment of his great work in the salvation of the world by Christ

Jesus, will see reason to think that the end proposed was worthy of God, and fully accounts for his interposition by signs and wonders, which were acts not only of great power, but of great goodness and benevolence towards mankind.

If we consider the miracles of the gospel, we shall find that they had the same ends in view. If Moses withstood the magicians of Egypt, and manifested a superiority of power over them, and the false gods whom they served, our Saviour did much more in opposition to the power of Satan, and the wicked spirits who had taken possession of men, and tormented them in divers manners: in subduing them he showed such an uncontrollable power, that they were obedient to his command; and when he said Go, they were forced to go, yielding a ready though unwilling obedience. And as the gospel spread, idolatry fled before it, the heathen deities became dumb, and their oracles were silenced. And if we look abroad into the world, and take a view of the nations where idolatry and superstition once prevailed, and where the knowlege of the unity and supremacy of God is now established, which happy change can only be ascribed to the propagation of the gospel, we shall see how fully and perfectly this great end was answered by the miracles wrought by Christ.

If Moses had a commission from God to publish his will to the people of the Jews, Jesus had a far more ample commission to publish the terms of God's salvation to all mankind: and as these terms were of God's appointment, and not such as human wisdom could suggest, they stood in need of the evidence of miracles to support them.

It has been observed before, that no miracles can alter the clear dictates of natural religion. The same may be said with respect to any former divine revelation: for to suppose a revelation to come from God, and to be fully established by miracles, and that a later revelation on the like proof and authority should abrogate and render the former void, would be setting up miracle against miracle, and destroy the authority of both: and therefore, admitting the Mosaic revelation and the Christian to be both of divine original, they must necessarily be consistent, and each be in its proper place to carry on the great and ultimate views of Providence. This evidently

was the case of Moses, who came to prepare the way for the full and perfect declaration of God's will, reserved till He should come who was the end of the law: and to this purpose are the words of our blessed Saviour: 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled:' Matt. v. 17, 18. And during the whole course of his ministry he constantly appealed to the testimony of the law and the Prophets: 'had you believed in Moses,' says he to the Jews, 'you would have believed me: for he wrote of me.' And his Apostle St. Paul, in his defence before king Agrippa, gives this account of the gospel he preached: 'Having obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the Prophets and Moses did say should come.' And indeed one revelation admitted to be of divine authority must be a touchstone to try all succeeding revelations by: for God cannot contradict himself; and the great works done by Moses and by Christ are not only an evidence of their divine authority, but are a bar to all succeeding pretenders. The miracles reported to have been done in the heathen world are unworthy of God, considered either in themselves or the end proposed by them: for let it be observed that God never works miracles merely to astonish and surprise people, but always to serve some great ends of providence: and though he has in favor of his people, and sometimes even of particular persons, wrought a miracle; yet when he published the law and the gospel, he did not rest the authority on one or more single miracles, but on a long series of miracles exhibited from day to day for years together. And if miracles are properly applied as a proof of the purposes and the will of God, miracles wrought without being attended with any declaration of God's will in which we have any concern, are very improper instances to be set up in opposition to those of Moses and Christ, on which the happiness of mankind depends in this life and that which is to come. This consideration gives weight and authority to the miracles of the gospel: for it was a design worthy of God to restore mankind to that happiness which they had

forfeited; and it was a work in every view of equal dignity and benevolence with the creation: for if God is adorable in the work of the creation, he is equally so in the work of redemption; and there is at least as much goodness in making men happy as in making them at all.

With what color of reason can the pretended miracles of the heathen world be brought into this question, which were done on trifling occasions, unworthy of the interposition of God? Look into all the ancient oracles; see to what mean purposes they are applied, and how often they prove destructive to those who relied on them; and then tell me what marks you see of divine wisdom or goodness in them, that should set them on an equal foot with the miracles of Christ Jesus.

We read in the Old Testament of some miracles wrought in behalf of particular people and for particular purposes; but neither are these, though of divine authority, to be set in competition with the miracles of the gospel: for they were not introductory to any scheme of religion or new declaration of God's will, but are rather to be considered as acts of government, and suitable to the character of God as king of Israel; for where the government itself was divine, no wonder to see the measures of the government to be of the same kind. And this character of God being peculiar to the Jews, is the reason why such miracles were frequent under the Jewish law, and are very rarely to be met with under the gospel.

Secondly, I am to consider what sort of works are to be admitted for miracles in proving the truth of any religion.

The first suspicion that men naturally have of any one who pretends to prophecy or inspiration is, that he has contrived the whole matter himself: for we have seen many visions and inspirations imposed on the vulgar by men of very bad heads or very bad hearts. And therefore the first inquiry is, whether the miracles might not proceed from human art or cunning?

And shall I undertake to prove, that it exceeds the power of man to raise the dead to life, to give sight to the blind, and to cure all diseases by the word of his mouth? No: never was any such attempt set up. But perhaps no such miracles were ever really done, and the people were deceived by false appearances. As for instance, when the man born blind was

restored to sight, he did not indeed recover his eyes, but all the rest of the people lost theirs; which I think would be the greater miracle of the two: for it is as easy to believe that the word of Christ should make one man see, as that it should make a thousand blind.

But must they, you will say, of necessity proceed from God, because they could not be wrought by men? Were they effects of nothing else but infinite power?

The miracles of the gospel, being such works as neither human wisdom nor power can perform, force us to have recourse to a superior invisible cause. But still you will say, can the wit of man discover all the different orders of beings between himself and his Creator, their powers and properties, so as with security to affirm that no being but the All-wise and Almighty God could perform these wonderful things; especially considering that no effects, neither the miracles of the gospel, nor the works of nature, can prove directly an infinite power or wisdom? For who will be bold to say, that the wisdom and power of God were exhausted in the visible works of the creation, so that there is nothing either wiser or greater that infinite wisdom and power can contrive or execute?

Let this matter be rightly stated, and thus it will stand: the works of nature are certain proofs of an all-powerful cause; not because they appear to be works of infinite power, and such as cannot be exceeded, but because of necessity they prove in course of argument a first cause of all things; which first cause being unlimited, nothing is or can possibly be done, that the power of the first cause cannot do. And therefore the works of the creation must be and are admitted as an infallible proof of the being of a God. Let it then be remembered that a revelation is not introduced to prove the being of a God; that the miracles of our Saviour were not wrought to that purpose, but supposing the being of a God, to prove God the Author of the revelation: and then it must be allowed, that if we bring as good arguments to prove God the author of the revelation, as can be brought to prove the being of a God, all who believe the being of a God are equally obliged to believe the divinity of the revelation.

The first and most natural notion of God is, that he is the

Maker of the world, and all things in it. This was the notion the Jews had of God; and when they distinguished the true God from the heathen gods, they defined him to be the Maker of the world and mankind. Look then into the miracles of the gospel, and you will see this attribute of God as clearly demonstrated by them as by the works of nature: for there you will find that the Author of the Christian miracles is the Maker of mankind; for by him men were made; that is, dead bodies were made into living men: for to raise a dead man, and to make a new man, are much the same thing. Any matter may be formed even by human art into the shape of a man; but it is adding life that makes the man. If we believe we received our senses, our reason, our natural strength and vigor, from the true God at first, look into the gospel, and you will find the miracles of Christ are from the same hand: for to the blind he gave sight, to the deaf hearing, to the lame and sick strength and soundness, to demoniacs and lunatics he gave reason and a right mind: or if you choose rather to look into the material world for the proof of a God; if you think the beauty, order, and regularity of the world speak God to be both Author and Governor of nature; search the gospel, and you will find the miracles of Christ derive themselves from the Governor of the world, and speak the same language with the works of nature: for at his word the stormy winds were laid; the sea obeyed his voice: when he suffered, all nature trembled; the earth shook, the veil of the temple was rent, the sun and the moon were darkened: which drew from the centurion attending at his execution the confession, 'Truly this was the Son of God.' If you appeal to the natural sense and notions of mankind for the idea of the true God, and thence collect his essential attributes, justice, righteousness, holiness, and goodness, let the voice of nature be still; and the gospel shall speak more plainly, how just, how righteous, how holy and good God is, who is Author of the salvation and redemption which is by Christ Jesus. Take what way you will to prove the being or the attributes of God, and in the same way with equal advantage we will prove the God of the world, that is, the only true God, to be the Author of Christianity; which all who believe the being of a God are bound to admit for a

proof of the truth of Christianity: for either the works of nature are not a good proof of the being of a God; or the works of the gospel, being of the same kind, and effects of equal power, must be allowed to prove God the Author of the gospel. And when our Saviour styled the wonders that he performed, 'the works that the Father had given him to finish,' he plainly appealed to the power of the Creator as manifested in the works that bore witness to him: for if any one else could have done the same works, there would have been no reason for calling them the works of the Father, nor would there have been any room for the inference which our Saviour draws from it: 'The Father himself, which hath sent me, hath borne witness of me:' John v. 37.

There is a question commonly asked on this occasion, to which it may be proper to give an answer; that is, how we know that these miracles did not proceed from an evil power, since we have instances, as some think, of miracles so wrought? The answer is, we know this the same way that any man knows the works of nature to proceed from a good being: for how do you know that the Creator of the world was a good being: if you answer that the Maker of mankind, the Author of nature, must of necessity be a good and holy being, because he has woven into the nature of man the love of virtue and hatred of vice, and given him distinct notions of good and evil, by which reason unerringly concludes the Author of this nature and these principles to be himself good and holy; I answer the same for the gospel of Christ: the love of virtue and hatred of vice is as inseparable from the gospel of Christ as from the reason of man; and the gospel of Christ more distinctly teaches to know and acknowlege the holiness and goodness of God, than reason or the works of nature can do: and therefore those who acknowlege the Author of nature to be a good being, have much more reason to acknowlege the Author of the Christian miracles to be a good being. But then we are told this is arguing in a circle; proving the doctrines first by miracles, and then the miracles again by the doctrines. But this is a great mistake, and it lies in this; that men do not distinguish between the doctrines we prove by miracles, and the doctrines by which we try miracles; for they are not

the same doctrines. God never wrought miracles to prove the difference between good and evil: and I suppose, if any man were asked how he proves temperance or chastity to be duties, murder or adultery to be sins, he would not recur to miracles for an argument. These and the like duties are enforced in the gospel, but were always truths and duties before our Saviour's coming: and we are in possession of them without the help of miracles or revelation. And these are the doctrines by which we try the miracles.

But the doctrines which are to be proved by miracles, are the new revealed doctrines of Christianity, which were neither known or knowable to the reason of man: such are the doctrines of salvation and redemption by Christ, of sanctification and regeneration by the Spirit of God: and whoever yet brought these doctrines to prove the truth or divine original of the miracles?

I shall only add, that what has been said, it concerns those chiefly to consider who hold fast and admire the principles of natural religion, but despise or overlook the proofs of Christianity. If they will but consider the tendency of their own principles, they are not far from the kingdom of God: for the same reasons that oblige them to believe in God, oblige them to believe in Christ also. And as we have one God the Father of all, so should we have one faith, and one Lord, even Jesus Christ, the Saviour and Redeemer of us all. And let them take heed, that, having been made partakers of so much grace, to the acknowlegement of the one true God, they fall not the more irrecoverably under condemnation by obstinately refusing to acknowlege his only and eternal Son, Jesus Christ the righteous.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XI.

PSALM VIII.—VERSE 4.

THE reflexion of the text naturally suggested by a consideration of the care of Providence, exemplified either in the works of nature or of grace. In the works of nature the glories of the heavens and the earth, plainly intended for our benefit, naturally lead us to wonder at the goodness of God in thus providing for beings so insignificant. The same reflexion may be made on the works of grace. Why should God continue his care towards sinful and disobedient creatures, and not only forgive them, but send his own Son to redeem them with his blood? These reflexions, which should naturally lead us to adore God's goodness, sometimes induce men to suspect the truth of the whole history of the redemption: their reasoning on this point shown to be erroneous; it being as hard to conceive that God should create this world for creatures like us, as it is that he should send his Son to redeem us: since it was as agreeable to God's goodness to *make* such creatures, it was consistent also that he should exert his power to *save* them. It is shown that a great opinion of ourselves and of the figure we make in the universe would be injurious to religion, serving only to exclude a sense of dependence and gratitude to God. The Psalmist's reflexion in the text evinces a sense of dependence on God, admiration of his mercies, and a consciousness of unworthiness: yet it has been used to other purposes; and as it has been said that the great works of nature are too wonderful to have been formed for so inconsiderable a part of creation as the race of men, so also, with re-

gard to the work of our redemption, that the end is not proportionate to the stupendous means used to attain it. It is considered whether these reflexions be a sufficient ground for questioning the truth of the gospel. Are we proper judges in this matter? Although in human affairs we may form a judgment by comparing the means and the end, and knowing the power of the agent, yet this will not apply to the works of nature, where the power of the agent is infinite; and as we cannot perfectly comprehend the end proposed, we are not qualified to judge rightly in the case before us: as all things are equally easy to be effected by God, we act most absurdly when we pretend to judge of his works by comparing them with the ends which we can discover to be served by them. This reasoning equally strong when applied to the works of grace. The wonders of the redemption are great and mysterious to us; but nothing is difficult with God. In judging of this matter we are also liable to fall into the error of supposing that we are the only persons concerned in the redemption, which, however immediately it concerns us, is intimated in many parts of Scripture to be adapted to answer the general ends of God's government in the universal moral world. The propriety of this will not be discovered by us, till we are enabled by a clearer light to see the whole scheme of Providence together. It has been shown that the objections against God's government in the natural and moral world, founded on the disproportion between the means used and the ends proposed, arise from the short-sightedness of men, and their propensity to judge on subjects on which they are ill-informed. It is considered whether the reflexions which have given rise to these objections do not admit of very different conclusions. Since God has provided abundantly for us in this life, it is reasonable to infer from thence that he will also provide for our well-being as moral and religious creatures. This shown also to be consistent with what the gospel has revealed to us. If we consider the ad-

vantages we enjoy from the works of nature, and compare them with the greater works of grace manifested in the gospel, it will appear that the methods of Providence, by which we hope to be saved, and which we have from revelation, are liable to no other objections than those are by which we live and which we see daily with our eyes. In both cases we may justly express ourselves in the words of the text.

DISCOURSE XI.

PSALM VIII.—VERSE 4.

What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?

WHEN we consider the care of Providence over the children of men, as it is manifested either in the works of nature or of grace, we naturally fall into the reflexion of the text, and wonder to see so much done for men, who seem to have no merit or desert equal to the concern showed for them. If we look up to the heavens, and view the sun, moon, and stars, and consider the power by which these mighty bodies were formed, the wisdom and contrivance by which their motions are regulated and adjusted; we see plainly, by the benefit we receive from them, that they were intended for our service: and yet what are we that we should be so served? If we look round this earth, the place of our habitation, we find it filled with many kinds of creatures, and adorned by the bountiful hand of nature, as if it were meant to be a seat of pleasure and happiness; and we are sure that this part of the world at least, was made for the benefit of man: here he is lord, and has dominion over the works of God; for on earth there is no creature to rival him in power or wisdom, or that can challenge any share of authority with him. But this lord of the earth, does he not come into it helpless? is he not wretched whilst he is in it, and oftentimes miserable when he is to go out of it? What must we say then? that this noble palace was erected and adorned merely to be turned into an hospital to receive the blind and the lame, the diseased in body and mind; to be the seat of him 'who is like a thing of nought, and his days like a shadow that passeth away.'

If we go on from the works of nature to the works of grace, the same reflexion will pursue us still. One would imagine that man, who had received so much from God, should at least continue to serve and obey his supreme Lord, and to acknowlege the Author of these great and good gifts: so far from it, that God was in a manner expelled from his own creation, and stocks and stones and the beasts of the fields were exalted and set up to receive the honor and worship due to the Creator. The morality of the world became answerable to the religion of it; and no wonder: for why should he not turn brute himself, who can be content with a brute for his God? The wonder lies on the other side, that God should continue his care and concern for such creatures; that he should be willing not only to forgive their iniquities, but that he should contrive the means of their redemption; and that in so wonderful a manner, as to send his own Son into the world, not only to instruct and reform them, but to redeem them by making atonement for their sins by his own blood. Who that considers this can help saying with the Psalmist, 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?'

Though these reflexions should naturally lead us to admire and adore the goodness of God, who has done so much when we deserved so little; for what stronger motive can there be for gratitude than undeserved favor? yet have they oftentimes another effect: for when men consider that God does nothing without reason, and at the same time see so little reason why God should do so much for them, they begin to suspect whether he has done it or no, and to imagine that the whole history of the redemption is a cunningly devised fable. To consider the Son of God coming down from heaven, living among men, and at last shedding his blood for them, fills them with wonder and astonishment: and when they look on the other side, they can see nothing in man that bears any proportion to this concern showed for him, or that yields any argument to justify the wisdom of God in this method of his redemption.

It must be owned, there is something plausible in this way of reasoning; and the more so, as it pretends to do justice to the wisdom of God, and cannot be charged with any great injustice

done to the character of man. But this prejudice, be the foundation of it good or bad, lies as strongly against the works of nature as it does against the works of grace: for it is as hard to conceive that God should create this world for the sake of placing in it such creatures as we are, as it is to conceive that he should send his Son to redeem us. If you can justify the wisdom and goodness of God in making such creatures, it will be no hard thing to justify his wisdom and goodness in redeeming them: for to open a way for men to escape out of a state of misery is a more divine and beneficent act, than the putting them into it. If you stumble at the dignity of the Redeemer, and think that the Son of God was too great a person to be concerned in saving men; for the same reason you should think that God or the Son of God was too great a person to be concerned in making such creatures as men: and from these and the like considerations you may as well conclude that God never made the world, as you do that he never redeemed it. But in spite of all these reasons, you see plainly that this earth was made for the habitation of men, wicked and inconsiderable as they are. Since therefore your consequence will not hold in this case, you have no reason to depend on it in the other; but rather to think that, since it was agreeable to the wisdom and goodness of God to exert his power to make such creatures, it was also consistent that he should exert his power to save and to redeem them.

It can serve to no good purpose to give men a great opinion of themselves, and of the considerable figure they make in the universe; nor can it be done with truth and justice. Experience, which shows us daily our own and the follies of those about us, will be too hard for all reasonings on this foot; and the mind of man, conscious of its own defects, will see through the flattery, which ascribes to it perfections and excellences with which it feels itself to be unacquainted. Or could a man, in spite of his own experience, be persuaded to think himself very considerable, and worthy of all that God has done for him; this opinion could tend only to make him proud and conceited, and to think the dispensations of Providence with regard to himself to be rather acts of justice, and due to his merit, than the effects of goodness and benignity in the gover-

nor of the world. Such an opinion would in a great measure exclude a sense of dependence, and in a greater still a sense of gratitude; which are vital and fundamental principles in religion.

But if we set out with taking a proper view of ourselves in the first place, and with considering the many imperfections and follies to which we are liable as rational agents, the many weaknesses and infirmities which surround us as animal creatures; and then survey the works of Providence, and the great care of God over us, manifested in his various dispensations in the natural and moral world; we shall easily enter into the true spirit of the holy Psalmist's reflexion, 'What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?' It is a reflexion naturally proceeding from the sense of our dependence on God, and leading to the highest degree of gratitude, whilst we contemplate with admiration the greatest of his favors, and consider ourselves as unworthy of his least.

This is the natural sense which the reflexion in the text suggests to us: yet has it, as I observed before, been used to other purposes; and some have thought it unworthy of God to suppose that in the great works of Providence he had any special regard to so inconsiderable a part of the whole, as the race of men appears to be. The objection, they think, grows stronger, when the scheme of Providence displayed to us in the gospel of Christ for the salvation of man is laid before them; and it appears to them astonishing that God should interest himself so particularly in an affair, which seems, when compared to the whole, of so little importance. If we ascribe this great work to the divine love and goodness, it cannot be controverted that they are strongly and evidently expressed and manifested in this proceeding; too strongly, it may be thought; since divine love and goodness must be bounded by divine wisdom, and can never degenerate into fondness and partiality; consequently, his love and goodness can never do what his wisdom does not approve as fit to be done.

On this foot it may be asked, where is the wisdom of erecting such a building as this for the service of such a creature as man? The works of nature are so immense and wonderful,

that, if they are formed for the sake of providing a proper habitation for man, the house seems to be of far greater dignity than the master, and the end proposed by no means to answer and justify the means made use of. So again, in the work of our redemption, if the only Son of God came down from heaven, and did and suffered all that is reported of him in the gospel; what is there in man, considered in the most advantageous light, that bears any proportion to this wonderful method made use of to save him, or to justify the wisdom of God in sending the Lord of power, and of the whole creation, to die for the meanest, perhaps, of all intelligent beings belonging to it?

Now, whether these reflexions on our weak and infirm condition, and the low rank we hold in the order of intelligent beings, be a sufficient ground for calling into question the credibility of the great things said to be done for us, is a matter deserving serious consideration. And

The first question we should ask ourselves is, whether we are proper judges in this matter? It is a great undertaking to judge of the wisdom of God, and to say what is fit or not fit for him to do; especially where the subject of the inquiry is the counsels of God in governing the natural and moral world; points, not only of the highest consequence, but of all others the most removed out of our sight.

In human affairs we pretty well know the powers and abilities of men, and can oftentimes judge of the ends they propose to themselves; and this knowlege of their powers, and this ability to judge of the ends they propose, qualifies us in many cases to estimate comparatively the means and the end, and to discern whether the thing aimed at is worth the expense or labor employed in obtaining it. This judgment cannot be made merely by considering and comparing the means and the end together; but consideration likewise must be had of the power and ability of the agent. The end of building a house is for the habitation of men: but whether the house be too big or too little, too magnificent or not magnificent enough, can never appear from considering merely the end of building of a house, which is for men to dwell in; but you must take into the account the power, station, wealth, and other circum-

stances of the builder, and then you may reasonably say whether too much or too little pains and cost have been bestowed on it. To apply this to the present case: when you view the works of nature, you think them too great and too magnificent to be intended for the use of man: but consider a little, who is the builder? Is it not one of whose power and ability you cannot possibly judge? How do you know then that it was not as easy (and doubtless it was as easy) to God to produce this beautiful and wonderful order of things, as to have produced a much worse, and more adapted, as you may imagine, to the circumstances of man, the inhabitant of this world? You cannot say too much pains or too much cost has been bestowed: for all these considerations are relative to the power of the agent; and when the agent has infinite power, this consideration is wholly excluded.

But farther; in order to judge rightly in the case before us, we ought perfectly to comprehend the end proposed. If you see a great building, but know not for what use it was intended, nor what use is made of it, it is impossible to judge whether it be too large or too confined; for that judgment must arise necessarily from knowing to what purpose and to what use it was erected. And where is the man who will pretend to know all the ends of God in the creation of the universe? what relates to ourselves we know tolerably well from sense and experience: we feel the influence of the heavenly bodies, and are sure that we are the better for them; but that no others are, besides ourselves, we can never be sure.

Since then we know nothing of the power of God but that it is infinite, the true consequence from which is, that all possible things are equally easy to be effected by his hand; since the purposes of God to be served in the creation of the universe are various, and more than we can discover, probably more than we can even imagine; we act the absurdest part in the world, when we pretend to judge of the works of Providence by comparing the greatness of the works of nature with such ends and purposes as we can discover to be served by them: for with respect to the infinite power of God, we talk childishly when we call his works great or little; and with

respect to the ends and purposes of Providence, supposing a just measure of his works were to be taken from thence, yet it is a measure of which we are not masters.

As this reasoning must necessarily hold in the works of nature, so is it equally strong when applied to the works of grace. It is indeed a surprising and wonderful event, the coming of the Son of God into this world, being made man, and born of a pure virgin, living and dying as a man to redeem sinners. But what is there that shocks your faith in this? You think perhaps the means too great and too considerable to be made use of for the sake of the end proposed, which might have been obtained at a cheaper rate. But when you say or think this, do you pretend to know by what other way all the purposes of God in sending his Son into the world might have been answered? If you do not, possibly this was the only way to answer all the ends and intentions of Providence in this great work; and if it was, the means used were necessary, and therefore, without doubt, proper: and supposing them proper, you will not surely be surprised that God should design, and his blessed Son undertake to perform, what was proper to execute the wise ends of Providence. It was indeed a very great thing for a man to be born of a virgin: but in what sense was it great? only as being unusual, and contrary to the established course, in our eyes: with respect to God, I see no reason to call it so. Were God to form a new race under this new law of nature, that all should be born of virgins, I conceive there would be nothing in it more wonderful than in the present established course of nature.

It is more wonderful still to think of the Son of God living on earth in the form and fashion of a man; and if we speak in relation to our own abilities of searching into this mysterious work, it is and it ever must continue to be a wonder: but with respect to God, have you any reason to think this wonderful and mysterious, or a thing difficult to be performed? God has united our spirits, our souls, to these bodies: a wonderful and a mysterious thing it is to us: but can you imagine there is any thing in the works of God, that is wonderful, mysterious, or difficult in the execution to him? If not, how weakly do we

amuse ourselves, when we set ourselves with great wisdom to weigh the works of God in our scales, and to judge which are great and difficult in the performance!

But this is not the only mistake men are liable to, when they set themselves up for judges in this matter. That the redemption and salvation of men is the end of Christ's coming into the world, is certain, and is revealed in the gospel; but whoever shall say God had no other purpose in view than this only, will judge hastily, and, I doubt, rashly. What relates to us immediately in this great dispensation, God has been pleased to reveal to us distinctly; but he has no where told us that we are the only persons concerned: that others probably are, may be collected from many intimations in Scripture. Our blessed Redeemer has 'all power given him in heaven' as well as in earth: 'principalities and powers,' the invisible powers, 'are made subject to him:' and they cannot be thought to be unconcerned in that work, for the sake of which their King was exalted, and 'every knee' made 'to bow' to him. How they are concerned, we know not: but this we know, that we are but a small part of the natural world. That there are many intelligent beings besides ourselves we know; that they may be numberless we have reason to believe; that God is the common Governor of all, is out of question; that all his dispensations in the moral government of the world regard the whole, and will finally appear in the eyes of every rational creature to be just and equal, we have great reason to conclude; and that God 'will be justified in his sayings, and clear when he is judged.' If this be so, the great work of our redemption, however immediately it relates to us, must be supposed adapted to answer the general ends and purposes of God's government in the universal moral world. And this plainly shows that we cannot judge of the propriety of the means made use of for redeeming the world by considering only the relation they have to men; for probably they relate to others, and to other purposes, and are, on the whole, in every respect proper and fit: but the propriety cannot be discerned by us, nor will it till we come into a clearer light, and see the whole scheme of Providence together.

You see then, on the whole, that the objections against God's government in the natural and moral world, founded on the disproportion between the means made use of and the ends proposed, are really the effects of short-sightedness, and of that great propensity which men have to judge, though they want proper materials to form a judgment on.

But let us consider whether the observations which have given rise to these perverse reasonings, will not, if duly attended to, open a way to far other and far juster conclusions. That men are weak and wretched, and not worthy of the care of Providence over them, we know by sad experience; and have reason enough, in this view, to fall into the Psalmist's reflexion, 'Lord, what is man, that thou regardest him?' But still most certain it is, that God does regard man: all nature bears witness to the truth of this; for he is served by the works of nature: and though the works of nature may serve a hundred purposes more, yet it cannot be doubted but that they were made to serve man, though not him alone. This must appear on the strictest inquiry; for considering this solar system, of which we are a part, we have no reason to think but that it bears as great proportion to the whole as any other system: in this system our earth is one considerable part: and this part was manifestly prepared for man, who has dominion over it. So that the human race is no inconsiderable part of the creation in this way of reckoning: and it is reasonable to say, that the world was made, if not for him only, yet as much and as truly for him as for others.

Being then possessed of this fact, that, weak and infirm as we are, God has abundantly provided for us in this life; and that, considered as part of the natural world, we have a very full proportion of good things allotted to us; what conclusion does it lead us to, if we consider ourselves as part of the rational and moral world? Is it reasonable to imagine that God has taken so much care of us in his natural government of the world, and that he will neglect us in the moral part of it? that he regards us as animals, but has no regard to us as rational agents? Can any man think seriously of God, as a reasonable, just, and upright Being, and suppose this to be the case?

Now, these considerations lay a foundation for a just expectation from the goodness of God of his assistance in our case, where it is most wanted; that is, for his assistance to us as rational and moral beings, as capable of being happy or miserable by virtue or by vice.

There is a similitude and proportion in all the works of God: and it is reasonable to infer, from the visible regard showed to us in one respect, the regard had for us in all; especially in the principal and most concerning relation in which we stand towards him; that is as rational agents. And this leads us directly to suppose that God will provide for our well-being as moral and religious creatures, with a care, at least, equal to that shown for us in our natural capacity in this world.

Join now to this presumption what the gospel has expressly revealed to us, and see whether the whole is not of a piece, and consistent.

The gospel tells us that God has sent his Son to redeem us: you wonder he should take so much trouble for such creatures: but is it not as becoming his goodness to redeem us, as it was to make us? You will say perhaps, we are since that become sinners. True; and yet, ever since that, he has preserved us, and afforded us the blessings of this life: and is it not of a piece to open to us the hopes of a better? Mistake not my meaning: I do not mean to infer from what God does for us in this world, that he is bound in justice to do as much for us in respect to another. I know of nothing that he is bound in justice to do for us. But surely it is safest reasoning on the ways of Providence from the manifest works of Providence: and by seeing how God has dealt with the children of men as part and as inhabitants of this natural world, it is reasonable to conclude in what manner he will treat them as part of the moral world. And if we consider what we see and know of the works of nature, and of the good we enjoy from them, and compare them with the greater works of grace, as manifested in the gospel of Christ Jesus, we may easily discern the consistency and harmony of God's dealings in both cases; and see too, at the same time, that the methods of Providence by which we hope to be saved, and which we have from revelation, are liable to no other objections than the methods of Providence by which we live,

and which we see daily with our eyes. In both cases the works of God are indeed wonderful, and we unworthy of the least of them: and we may justly say of both, 'Lord, what is man, that thou regardest him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XII.

ACTS, CHAP. X.—VERSES 34, 35.

SOME men have been bold enough to despise and reject the offer of salvation by the gospel, conceiving themselves authorised by this text to live according to the principles and light of nature: hence worth while to examine its real meaning. It is shown that the Jews had a notion, that the blessings of the promised Messiah were to be *confined* to themselves; which notion the disciples, and especially St. Peter, entertained: the former however were soon convinced that *God had also unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life* (Acts xi. 18), and the latter, comparing Cornelius's vision with his own, expresses his own conviction of the same truth in the words of the text. In his confession, *to be accepted with God*, has the same meaning as the expression, *repentance unto life*, in theirs; both mean admission into the covenant of God through Christ: so that the text signifies, that 'God has not confined his mercies to a particular nation; but that all are capable of inheriting his promises in Christ, who are duly prepared by righteousness and the fear of God.'

This farther shown by an examination of the case of Cornelius, and what the acceptance was which he found. He was a Gentile, and one of the best; yet this did not make it unnecessary for him to become a Christian: indeed the vision was sent for a contrary purpose; to inform him where he might seek and find a proper instructor: nor could St. Peter mean that those who did their best, on the light of nature, had no need of any other teacher; else he would not have instructed him in the

knowlege, and baptized him in the name of Christ. St. Peter meant that all Gentiles, duly prepared, were capable of the mercies of the gospel, in opposition to his former error, that the Jews only had this privilege.

Hence we may learn what is the true notion of that acceptance to which the Gentiles are thus entitled.

But a difficulty arises from the terms to which St. Peter limits this privilege; viz. to those only who *fear God and work righteousness;* which seems to take it for granted that we are possessed of the main thing for which the privilege is given; inasmuch as it is one great end of Christianity to teach us those things. To clear up this matter, a consideration of Heb. xi. 6. recommended: a man cannot offer himself to God, much less enter into the covenant of his mercy, without a firm persuasion of his Being, and a due notion of his attributes: without this the gospel cannot be so much as tendered to him; for it does not teach, but supposes this doctrine: St. Peter therefore must not be understood as limiting the mercies of God to certain persons of the best character, but rather as declaring the natural order of things: it is frequently taught that Christ came to save sinners; and therefore he exhorted to repentance, as John the Baptist did before him.

But should the case of the *devout* Cornelius incline us to think that St. Peter meant a greater degree of goodness than was commonly to be found, this will show that the best of men stand in need of the assistance of the gospel to secure to themselves the end of their hopes: those who are of a different opinion, are recommended to consider the high moral character of Cornelius, and then ask themselves, why God should send a vision to him and to St. Peter for the purpose of making him a Christian.

It may be asked perhaps, what would have become of Cornelius, had he died, as he lived, without coming to the knowlege of Christ? a question of speculation more than profit, and

which can no way affect us who *are* called to that knowlege. We may well take it for granted, that, had he so died, he would have found rest to his soul through God's mercy. It concerns us more to consider, what his case would have been, if he had rejected the call made by St. Peter, and insisted on his own merits and virtue, in opposition to the grace offered him by the gospel: would this have been a pardonable error? could he have maintained his former character, after such contempt? and what would his future works have been worth, after he had renounced that sacrifice which alone could sanctify them? Yet bad as his supposed case would have been, it is the case of those who, having been betimes instructed in the knowlege of the gospel, reject it under the color of preserving the purity of natural religion; for the voice of God is the same, whether he speaks by his Apostles, or by his Angels.

DISCOURSE XII.

ACTS, CHAP. X.—VERSES 34, 35.

Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

THESE words, if not carefully attended to, may seem to carry a sense contrary to the meaning of the Apostle in delivering them. St. Peter in the text declares that God, without respect to any national or personal privileges, was ready to admit all people into the covenant made with Christ Jesus, provided they were duly prepared for such admission. Some from his words have concluded that there is no necessity of becoming disciples of Christ, but that it is sufficient if we live according to the principles and light of nature; forasmuch as 'every one who feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him:' and thus supported, as they think, by one passage of Scripture, they have been emboldened to despise and reject all the rest as of no use to them, and to put their salvation on their own strength, in opposition to the method revealed and declared by the Son of God. This error is common, as well as dangerous: and since the great regard which some pay to moral virtue is purely opposition to the gospel, it is worth while to examine this passage of St. Peter, and to place his meaning in a true light, that the doctrine of the gospel may not be overthrown by its own authority.

The Jews had a notion that the blessings of the promised Messiah were to be peculiar to themselves, and not to be extended to any other nation or people whatever, whom they looked on as aliens from God, and not under his care and protection, as they were. Hence in the Prophets they plead their privilege, and tell God that he is not God of the heathen, but

of the people of Israel; which conceit of theirs St. Paul refers to and confutes in his Epistle to the Romans: 'Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? yes, of the Gentiles also.' The disciples of our Lord, and especially St. Peter, were as deep in this opinion as others; and during our Saviour's abode on earth, they were confirmed in it by what they observed in him: he declared, 'he was not sent but to the lost sheep of the house of Israel:' and when he sent out his disciples to preach, he expressly charged them 'not to go into the way of the Gentiles, nor to enter into any city of the Samaritans; but to go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel:' and after his resurrection, when he enlarged their commission, and bade them 'Go, teach all nations;' they understood him not, but were inquisitive about 'his restoring the kingdom to Israel.' After the ascension, the Apostles continued at Jerusalem preaching to their own nation, till, on the persecution of St. Stephen, many fled into other parts, and though they went as far as Phenice, Cyprus, and Antioch, yet they 'preached the word to none but Jews only:' Acts xi. 19. And when St. Peter, admonished by an heavenly vision, had admitted some Gentiles into the church of Christ through baptism, he was called to an account for it by the Apostles and brethren who were in Judea, chap. xi. 1: nor were they satisfied, till he had told them what vision he had seen, what also Cornelius had seen, and in what a miraculous manner the Holy Ghost was poured forth on the Gentiles, before he ventured to baptize them: and then under the astonishment of this conviction they held their peace, blaming his behavior no longer; but glorified God, saying, 'Then hath God also unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life:' Acts xi. 18. St. Peter himself was equally surprised, when he found, by comparing Cornelius's vision with his own, that God had determined to admit the Gentiles as well as the Jews into the church of Christ; and he expresses himself in the same manner, though not just in the same words, with the Apostles and brethren. They say, 'Then hath God also unto the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.' St. Peter says, 'Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.' These two reflexions, as

they are made on the same case, one by St. Peter, when he was with Cornelius, the other by the Apostles and brethren, when St. Peter related the story of Cornelius, so are they in substance the same: and St. Peter, when he says, 'that in every nation he that feareth God—is accepted with him,' and the Apostles and brethren, when they say 'that God hath granted to the Gentiles repentance unto life,' mean one and the same thing: and therefore, in the text, 'to be accepted with God' means no more than to have from God the offer of 'repentance unto life;' and both certainly mean our having admission into the covenant with God through Christ Jesus. So that the whole of what St. Peter says in the text amounts to this: 'I now at length perceive that God has not confined his mercies to a particular nation only; but that all are capable of inheriting the promises in Christ Jesus, who are duly prepared by righteousness, and the fear of God.'

This will farther appear to be the true interpretation, if we examine the case of Cornelius, and what the acceptance was that he found. Cornelius was a Gentile, and one of the best of them; 'a devout man, and one who feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God alway:' and yet his goodness did not make it unnecessary for him to become a Christian. The heavenly vision was not sent to satisfy him that his righteousness was sufficient, and that he had no need to look out for farther assistance or direction: on the contrary, it was sent to inform him where he might seek and find a proper instructor. St. Peter had also a vision to prepare him to do the duty of an Apostle to the Gentile centurion; and when this devout man came to him, in obedience to the heavenly warning, he instructs him in the faith of Christ Jesus, and baptizes him with water: on which St. Peter says, he finds that men of all nations, who do righteously, are accepted with God. He could not possibly mean that those who did their best on the light of nature, had no need of any other teacher; that reflexion could never rise from the case before him: for why did he then instruct Cornelius in the knowlege of Christ, and baptize him in his name? St. Peter therefore certainly meant that all Gentiles duly prepared were capable of the blessings of the gospel through the mercy of

God; in opposition to his former error, that none but Jews had such a privilege. And the Apostle undoubtedly understood that the best of the Gentiles had need of the gospel; or else his commendation of the goodness of God amounts to this only, that he perceived that God would give to the honest-minded Gentiles, who feared him, and did righteously, that which they had no occasion to receive.

From the words and circumstances of the text thus explained, we learn what is the true notion of that acceptance, which St. Peter says the Gentiles of all nations are entitled to through the mercy of God.

But then there arises a difficulty from the terms to which St. Peter has limited this privilege: for he does not say that men of all nations are accepted of God; but that in every nation 'he that feareth God and worketh righteousness' is accepted of him. Now, one great end of the Christian religion being to instruct us in the fear of God, and in works of righteousness, it may seem strange that in order to the obtaining this benefit of being duly instructed in the fear of God, and in works of righteousness, it should be required, as a previous condition, that we should fear God, and do righteously: which condition supposes us already in possession of the main thing for which the privilege itself is granted; and consequently, the privilege becomes in a manner useless by our having the qualifications necessary to the obtaining it. To clear this matter, we must consider what the Apostle to the Hebrews teaches us, chap. xi. 6. 'Without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God, must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.' The meaning of which is, that a man cannot offer himself to God, much less enter into the covenant of his mercy, without a firm persuasion of his being, and a due notion of his attributes. He must know 'that he is;' otherwise he can never move or advance towards him: he must know also 'that he is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him;' or else he cannot be encouraged to move towards him: which two articles of belief infer a just fear of God as the supreme Governor of the world, and a desire to please him as the dispenser of rewards and punishments according to the good or evil which men do. This is the faith, with-

out which, the Apostle to the Hebrews says, it is impossible to please God; this is the faith with which, St. Peter says, the men of every nation are accepted with him. And in truth these qualifications are so necessary to a man's being accepted with God, and admitted into the covenant of his grace through Jesus Christ, that without them the gospel cannot be so much as tendered to him: for on what foot would you press men to become Christians in order to obtain the mercy of God, who have no sense of the fear of God, and consequently no concern about pleasing or displeasing him? The gospel does not teach, but suppose this doctrine: and was even an Apostle to preach to a nation perfectly ignorant of God, he must lay by the gospel, and first convince the people from reason and nature of the being of God, and the necessity of righteousness in order to deserve his favor, before he could invite them to embrace the gospel as the perfect rule of righteousness prescribed and ordained by God himself. And therefore, when St. Peter says, 'that in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him,' he is not to be understood as limiting the mercies of God to certain persons of the best character, but rather as declaring the natural order of things. It is frequently taught that our Lord came to save sinners; and therefore he began his preaching with an exhortation to repentance in the same words that John the Baptist had done before him, 'Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand:' which is as much as if he had said, turn to God, and fear him, working righteousness, that ye may be made members of the kingdom of his Son, which now approaches.

But should the case of Cornelius, 'who was a devout man, fearing God with all his house, giving much alms, and praying alway,' from which case St. Peter makes the reflexion contained in the text, incline us to believe that he means a greater degree of goodness by fearing God, and working righteousness, than was commonly to be found; and consequently, that what St. Peter says can be applied only to the most virtuous and best-disposed heathens; on this supposition, both the case of Cornelius and the declaration of St. Peter evidently prove that the best of men stand in need of the assistances of the gospel of Christ, to make themselves secure of obtaining the end of

their hopes, glory and immortality from God, who is the rewarder of them who diligently seek him. I would desire those who are of a different opinion, and think that they have no reason to trouble their heads about the Christian religion, provided they lead good moral lives, to consider the character of Cornelius: he was devout, and feared God with all his house: he was very charitable, and gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God continually. This, I suppose, they will allow to be a description of such a moral man as they mean; and I would ask then, for what purpose did God send a vision to Cornelius, and another to St. Peter, that Cornelius might be made a Christian? Was all this care thrown away on a mere unnecessary point, that might as well have been let alone? Was Cornelius thus called to the profession of the gospel, and was it of no consequence whether he had been called or no? If God made choice of Cornelius, one of the best of the Gentiles, to show that some of them were capable of his grace, he did at the same time demonstrate that all had need of it: for if the best, with all the light they enjoyed, wanted this assistance, what could the worst do without it?

It may be asked perhaps, what would have become of Cornelius, had he died as he had sometime lived, a devout Gentile, in the fear of God, full of alms and of prayers, without having been called to the knowlege of Christ Jesus? which question, if pursued through all its views, would open a large field of discourse, but such as would afford rather speculation than profit; since the case, however determined, could no way affect us, who have been called to the knowlege of Christ Jesus. Let it then be taken for granted that Cornelius, had he died in the circumstances before described, would have found rest to his soul from the mercy and goodness of God: and let this other question be considered, which is much more to our purpose, what would have been the case of Cornelius, if he had rejected the call, refused to hearken to St. Peter, and had insisted on his own merit and virtue, in opposition to the grace that was offered him through the gospel? Would such a refusal have been a pardonable error? Could he have maintained the character of one fearing God with all his house, after such an open contempt of the divine call? Could he ever have prayed more

to God to guide and direct his way, after he had absolutely denied to be guided and directed by him? Would even his alms have been an acceptable offering to the Almighty, after he had renounced that obedience which is better than sacrifice, and which is the only thing that can sanctify our imperfect works? If reason and natural religion teach us that it is our duty to please and to obey God, what part even of natural religion could this centurion have exercised, after he had solemnly rejected the counsel of God, and followed his own will in opposition to that of his Maker declared in the heavenly vision? As bad as this supposed case of Cornelius would have been, it is the very case of those who, having been betimes instructed in the knowlege of the gospel, and called to the faith and obedience of Christ Jesus, do despise and reject that faith under the color of preserving the purity of natural religion, and living according to the dictates of reason and morality. It makes no difference in the case that their call has been through the ordinary administrations of the church, and that Cornelius's was by a vision directed to himself: the voice of God is the same, whether he speaks by his Apostles, or by his Angels: whoever acts by the appointment of God, speaks with his authority: and the regular powers of the church being ordained by him, when the church speaks to her children conformably to the commission received, it is the voice of God calling men to repentance unto life through Christ Jesus. And whatever the condition of those may be who have never heard of the Lord who bought them, ours is certainly very bad, if, having heard of him, we reject and despise him. It is one thing not to believe in Christ, because we know him not; it is another to know him, and to disbelieve him. Though such ignorance may be an excuse, yet such knowlege must be condemnation.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XIII.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XXII.—VERSE 40.

MEANING of the text is, that the whole reason of religion lies in these two general commandments, or that in them all its particular duties and precepts are founded. Two heads of this discourse as follows: I. the true meaning and import of these commandments shown: II. some useful remarks made on the whole.

In St. Mark's gospel the same thing is said in different words: *there is none other commandment greater than these:* Mark. xii. 31. As beyond them there is nothing greater, by these two principles all the duties of religion must be governed. The reason of this is plain: for the relation between God and man being once known, the first conclusion is, *that we ought to love the Lord our God with all our heart,* &c.; and until this general principle be established, the particular duties owing to God cannot fall under our consideration. The same reason holds respecting the second general head: for the relation of man to man, and the common relation of all to one great master, being supposed, the result is, that we ought *to love our neighbor as ourselves,* that is, to do all we can to promote the happiness of each other.

These general principles being established, the particular duties flow from them naturally, and form a complete system of religion. The duties of religion are all relative, and there is no relative duty that love does not readily transform itself into, according to the circumstances of the person concerned:

thus, love to a superior becomes honor and respect; to an equal, friendship and benevolence; to an inferior, courtesy and condescension; to the miserable, pity and compassion. In negative duties this principle is no less effectual than in positive. Love will not permit us to injure or offend our brother, to neglect our betters, or despise our inferiors, &c. for *love worketh no ill to his neighbor.* This deduction of particular duties from the general principle is made by St. Paul, Rom. xiii. 8., &c. This notion of love, as being the fulness of the law, &c., explains a passage in St. James, chap. ii. 10. *Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and offend in one point, he is guilty of all.* The common interpretation of this passage shown to be erroneous. It has another appearance when fairly examined. In order to do this, we must look back to that which gave occasion to it, and follow the Apostle's argument step by step. The whole depends on the notion, which is common to the writers of the New Testament, that *love is the fulfilling of the law.* St. James considers the whole duty of man as contained in one law, viz., *thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself;* and then he argues rightly, that he who offends in one point is guilty of the whole law: for whether it be theft, or murder, or adultery, that you commit, it matters not; for any of these crimes is inconsistent with the law, which contains, and is, the whole, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself:* this farther shown from the 8th verse, where this law is called the *Royal Law*, because it is the first supreme law from which all others proceed, &c. This different version of the 11th verse of St. James given in the margin of the Bible. Being thus understood, there is no occasion for any nice distinctions to show how a man, by offending against one law, may become guilty of all; for this is no longer found to be a part of the Apostle's doctrine; which is, that he who sins in any particular instance against his brother, will be found to be a transgressor against this great vital principle of religion, *Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*

The other general head referred to in the text considered; viz., *the love of God:* this called *the first and great commandment:* from this head is to be deduced all the service, worship, and honor which we owe and pay to our Creator. All the duties of religion are relative; which is true here; for the duties we owe to God spring from the relation between God and us: also love naturally transforms itself into all relative duties according to circumstances: thus, if we love God, and consider him as Lord and Governor of the world, our love will soon become obedience; if we consider him wise, good, and gracious, it will become honor and adoration; and so on.

In the second place, some reflexions made which seem to arise naturally from the subject.

First; these two principles, from which all religion flows, must be consistent with one another, otherwise they could not both be principles of the same religion: the love of God therefore can in no case oblige us to act contrary to the love of our neighbor. One thing in our Saviour's argument, which may perhaps mislead some men, and therefore should be considered: of the love of God, it is said that it *is the first and great commandment;* the love of our neighbor is styled *the second, like unto it:* whence it might be inferred that the first is a law of superior obligation to the second, and may in some instances control and overrule it: it is shown however that this is not the case; and that our Saviour's saying that the love of God is the first commandment, is no reason for thinking that it is or can be inconsistent with the second: on the contrary, the love of our neighbor being deducible from the love of God, must ever agree with it: faults of ancient writers on morality shown, in that they have not gone higher for principles to build their precepts on, than to the common desires of nature and the several relations of man to man.

Secondly; our Saviour having declared that *on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets,* nothing is

or ought to be esteemed religion, that is not reducible to one or other of these principles. What then, it may be said, become of the institutions of religion, which cannot properly be referred to either? are they then no part of religion? It is answered to this, that there is a manifest difference between religion and the means of religion: whatever is part of religion, and yet not so on account of moral reason, can only be esteemed as means, ordained not for their own sake, but for the sake of that religion which is founded on moral reason. This distinction might teach men where to point their best endeavors, and where to place their hopes: for if our zeal be spent only on the means, and goes no farther, we are yet in our sins.

Hence also it is shown that there can be no competition or disagreement between the duties called moral and those called positive.

DISCOURSE XIII.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XXII.—VERSE 40.

On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

THE two commandments here referred to are set down in the verses immediately preceding the words of the text. At verse 37, we read, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind: This is the first and great commandment:' verse 38. At verse 39 follows, 'And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' Then come the words of the text, 'On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets:' the meaning of which saying is plainly this, that the whole reason of religion lies in these two general commandments; that in these all particular duties and precepts are founded; that nothing can be of any obligation in religion, but as it relates either to the love we owe to God, or the love we owe to our neighbor. In speaking of these words, I shall,

First, Show you the true meaning and import of them; and,

Secondly, Make some useful remarks on the whole.

In St. Mark's gospel the same thing is said in different words, though to the same effect. The words parallel to the text are these: 'There is none other commandment greater than these,' Mark xii. 31: that is, there is nothing in religion of a higher obligation than these two precepts; all the duties of religion must be governed by these two principles: beyond them there is nothing greater, nothing to limit or restrain them; but by them must every thing else be limited and restrained. The reason of this is plain: for the relation between God and man being once known, the first conclusion is, 'That we ought to love the Lord our God with all our hearts, with all our souls,

and with all our minds;' that is, to the utmost of our power: and until this general principle be established, the particular duties owing to God cannot fall under our consideration. There is no room to inquire after the proper instances of expressing our love to God, till the general obligation of loving God be known and admitted. The same reason holds likewise as to the other general head of religion, 'the love of our neighbor:' for the relation between man and man, and the common relation of all to one great Master, being supposed, the result is, that we ought 'to love our neighbor as ourself:' that is, to do all we can to promote the happiness of each other: and unless we have this general sense, we cannot be concerned to know in any particular case what is the proper instance of love which we ought to show towards our neighbor.

But these general principles being once established, the particular duties flow from them naturally. The love of God and the love of our neighbor, if carefully attended to, will easily grow into a complete system of religion. The duties of religion are all relative, regarding either God or man; and there is no relative duty that love does not readily transform itself into on the mere view of the different circumstances of the persons concerned. Love, with regard to a superior, becomes honor and respect, and shows itself in a cheerful obedience and a willing submission to the commands of authority: love, with respect to our equals, is friendship and benevolence: towards inferiors it is courtesy and condescension: if it regards the happy and prosperous, it is joy and pleasure, which envy cannot corrupt: if it looks towards the miserable, it is pity and compassion; it is a tenderness which will discover itself in all the acts of mercy and humanity.

In negative duties this principle is no less effectual than in positive. Love will not permit us to injure, oppress, or offend our brother: it will not give us leave to neglect our betters, or to despise our inferiors: it will restrain every inordinate passion, and not suffer us either to gratify our envy at the expense of our neighbor's credit and reputation, or our lust by violating his wife or his daughter; but it will preserve us harmless and innocent: for 'love worketh no ill to its neighbor.' This deduction of particular duties from this general principle was made by

St. Paul long since: 'Owe no man,' says he, 'any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet: and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. Love worketh no ill to his neighbor: therefore love is the fulfilling of the law:' Rom. xiii. 8, &c.

This notion of love, as being the fulness of the law, and of all the commandments being comprehended in this saying, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' will lead us to the true and natural interpretation of a passage in St. James, which, as it is commonly understood, is liable to great difficulties and objections, and to those who have plain sense, and can follow it, must appear absurd: 'Whosoever,' says he, 'shall keep the whole law, and offend in one point, he is guilty of all:' chap. ii. 10. This is a position something strange, that an offence against one law should be a breach of all laws, however different they are in kind and degree; that he who commits adultery, for instance, should therefore be guilty of murder and robbery, and other the like heinous offences, nothing related to the sin of adultery. But let us consider the Apostle's reason in the next verse: 'For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.' This reason, as interpreters commonly expound it, amounts to this: all laws are founded on one and the same authority of God; therefore every offence against any law is a contempt of the authority on which all laws depend; and therefore every act of disobedience is a breach of the whole law, because subversive of that authority on which the whole law stands. But there are many objections against the reason thus stated: first, it is liable evidently to all the difficulties of the Stoics' paradox, that all offences are equal: for if the guilt of sin depends not on the nature and circumstances of the sinful action, but on the authority of the lawgiver, then every sin, being an offence against the same authority, is of the same guilt and heinousness; and there will be no difference between killing your neighbor or

your neighbor's horse; for he that has forbid you killing your neighbor, has likewise forbid you doing any act to the hurt and detriment of your neighbor: secondly, the Apostle's inference in the latter part of the verse does not answer to the principle laid down in the former part: 'He that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.' This is his principle; and he infers, 'Now, if thou commit no adultery, yet, if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law:' no doubt of it; because there is a law against murder as well as against adultery. But what is this towards showing that the breach of one law is the breach of all? The inference therefore should have been on this foot: now, if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art guilty of all the laws by disobeying the Author of all laws.

But this passage of St. James will have another appearance, when fairly examined. In order to it, we must look back to that which gave occasion to it, and follow the Apostle's argument step by step. The whole depends on the notion which is common to the writers of the New Testament, that 'love is the fulfilling of the law.' St. James considers the whole duty of man to man as contained in one law, namely, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself:' and then he argues rightly, he who offends in one point is guilty of the whole law: for whether it be theft, or murder, or adultery, that you commit, it matters not; for any of these crimes is inconsistent with the law, which contains and is the whole, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' But hear the Apostle's own words; in the eighth verse you read thus: 'If ye fulfil the royal law according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well:' where, first, you are to observe that he calls this the royal law; not because given by Christ the King, as some tell us, for all laws are in that sense royal laws; but because it is the first supreme law, from which all others proceed as distinct branches, and by which they must all be governed. Secondly, you must take notice what stress the Apostle lays on their 'fulfilling' this royal law: 'If ye fulfil the royal law —ye do well:' that is, if you attend to it in all instances, so as not to offend against it in any case, ye then will do well. The Apostle proceeds in the next verse, 'But, if ye have respect to

persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.' The law in this verse is the same law that was mentioned before, that is, 'the royal law:' if, says he, you have any partial regards, you will not then fulfil the law of love, but will be found to be transgressors of that law; 'for,' as it follows in the tenth verse, 'whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.' In this verse he considers the royal law, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself,' as the whole law, and all particular commandments as points of that law. And what he says amounts to this: whatever regard you may have to the law of loving your neighbor, which all profess to walk by, yet assure yourselves you cannot keep that law, if you offend against any one rule of charity; for every such single offence is a breach of that whole law: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' In the eleventh verse he gives the reason of his assertion: 'For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.' The words in the original, here translated 'for he that said,' are of doubtful interpretation. The sense followed by interpreters and translators has misled people in the understanding of this whole place. Instead of 'for he that said,' it should be rendered, for 'the law' which said, 'Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill.' The place thus rendered contains a clear reason of what went before: if, says he, you offend in any point of charity or duty, you become a transgressor of this whole law, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself:' for this law of loving thy neighbor, which says to thee, 'Do not commit adultery,' says likewise to thee, 'Do not kill.' And now, if you go to the latter part of the verse, you will find it exactly suited to the whole thread of discourse which went before; for thus it follows, 'Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law;' that is, of that general law of loving thy neighbor, which said as well to thee, 'Thou shalt not kill,' as 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.'

How this royal law speaks to us in the language of all particular laws and precepts is easily understood, and is distinctly explained by St. Paul in the place already produced: 'For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not

covet: and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself:' Rom. xiii. 9.

As to the different version of the eleventh verse in St. James, which I have made choice of, our own translators plainly saw the propriety of it, and have given that version in the margin of the bible. To them therefore, and their reasoning, I refer you.

This place in St. James being thus understood and explained, there is no occasion for any niceties or distinctions to support the reason and equity of his doctrine, or to show how a man, by offending against one law, may become guilty of all; since this assertion will no longer be found to be part of the Apostle's doctrine. What he teaches is plainly this: the great and fundamental law of the gospel is this, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' The force of this all see, and all acknowlege; and whilst they pretend to be Christians, all must pretend at least to obey. But, says he, whoever in any manner offends, injures, or oppresses his brother, it matters not in what way, whether it be by undue and partial preference of one to another, by contempt, or slander, by theft, adultery, or murder; whoever, I say, in any of these instances sins against his brother, will be found to be a transgressor against this great, this vital, principle of religion, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' For this reason he tells them, the way to do well was 'to fulfil the royal law,' that is, to observe all the points of it; because no point could be transgressed, but the transgressor must be found guilty of the whole law, which is a general law of love extending to all points. There is nothing hard in this sense, nothing but what any man may see the reason of: for certainly to injure our neighbor in any way makes us guilty of the breach of the law, which commands us to love our neighbor; for one injurious action is as inconsistent with love as another; and in this respect injurious actions have no difference, for they are all equally inconsistent with the great law.

The giving light to this passage in St. James has not misled us from the main purpose of this discourse; for we have seen at the same time the true extent and meaning of the text, with respect to one of the laws referred to in it, and which is easily

applicable to the other. St. James has fully taught us our Saviour's meaning, when he said, 'On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

But let us turn to consider the other general head referred to by our Saviour in the text, namely, 'the love of God.' 'This,' says our Lord in the thirty-eighth verse, 'is the first and great commandment.' From this head are to be deduced all the service, worship, and honor, which we owe and pay to our Creator. I observed to you before that all the duties of religion are relative: which is true in that part now under consideration; for the duties we owe to God are founded in the relation between God and us. Were there no such relation, the perfections of God might be matter of admiration, but could not be the ground of duty and obedience. I observed likewise to you that love naturally transforms itself into all relative duties, which arise from the circumstances of the persons related. Thus, in the present case, if we love God, and consider him as the Lord and Governor of the world, our love will soon become obedience: if we consider him as wise, good, and gracious, our love will become honor and adoration: if we add to these our natural weakness and infirmity, love will teach us dependence, and prompt us in all our wants to fly for refuge to our great Protector: and thus, in all other instances, may the particular duties be drawn from this general principle. Prayer and praise, and other parts of divine worship, which are the acts of these duties, are so clearly connected to them, that there is no need of showing distinctly concerning them, how they flow from this general commandment.

Having thus given you an account of the text, with respect to both the principles of religion referred to in it, 'the love of God,' and 'the love of our neighbor,' I would now, in the second place, lay before you some observations which seem to arise naturally from the whole.

The first is, that these two principles, from which our Lord tells us all religion flows, must be consistent with one another; otherwise they could not both be principles of the same religion. The love of God therefore can in no case oblige us to act contrary to the love of our neighbor. Our Saviour has

told us indeed, that the time would be, when some should think they did God good service by destroying their brethren: but I do not find the religion or the zeal of those persons much commended; but this very character is given of them to show how little they knew or understood their duty. And yet, could such a case ever happen, in which it might become our duty to hurt our neighbor, in order to promote the honor of God, it could not be a just character of false zeal, to say that it made men think they did God good service by destroying or abusing their neighbors; because, on this supposition, it might happen to be the character of true religious zeal.

There is one thing in our Saviour's argument which may perhaps mislead men in judging on this case, and which therefore may deserve to be particularly considered. Of the love of God our Saviour says, 'it is the first and great commandment:' the love of our neighbor he styles 'the second, like unto it.' Now from hence perhaps it may be inferred that the love of God, which is the first and great commandment, is a law of a superior obligation to that which is only the second, and may therefore in some instances control and overrule it. From whence it would follow, that we might lawfully overlook the love of our neighbor, in obedience to the superior obligation we are under to love God. Now, on supposition that our duty to God and our neighbor could ever interfere, I should readily allow that we ought to love God rather than man: but our Saviour's saying the love of God is the first commandment, is no manner of reason to think that it ever is, or can be, inconsistent with the second.

The love of God is properly styled the first commandment, in respect to God who is the object of the love, and because it is indeed the foundation of all religion, even of that commandment which is styled the second. But this is so far from showing that the love of God may ever clash with the love of our neighbor, that it proves the contrary; for if the love of our neighbor is deducible from the love of God, it must ever be consistent with it.

I know very well that the ancient writers of morality have not gone higher for principles to build their precepts on, than to the common desires of nature, and the several relations of

man to man; but that is their fault; for they might have looked farther with very good success: for if we consider God as the common Father of mankind, and (as from his goodness and impartiality we must needs judge) equally concerned for the welfare of his children, we shall have a very sure foundation for all the moral duties. No man, who thinks himself bound to love and obey God, can think himself at liberty to hurt or oppress those whom God has taken under his care and protection: no man, who believes it his interest as well as his duty to please God, but must likewise believe it his interest and duty to be kind and tender towards those who are the children of God, and in whose happiness he is not an unconcerned spectator. For this reason the love of God is called the first and great commandment; and for this reason it never can be inconsistent with the love of our neighbor, which is the second. In all cases therefore where your duty to your neighbor is plain and clear, depend on it your duty to God concurs with it. All scruples to the contrary are wicked, perhaps wicked hypocrisy; for it is the greatest indignity to God to use his name and pretend his honor, to cover the injuries you are doing to his creatures and your own brethren.

The second observation I would make from the text is, that our Saviour having declared 'that on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets,' it is certain that nothing is or ought to be esteemed religion, that is not reducible to one or other of these principles.

But what then, you will say, must become of the institutions of religion, which, considered in themselves, and according to their own nature, are not properly to be referred either to the love of God or our neighbor? for if all that is religion may be so referred, it should seem that these institutions, which cannot be so referred, are no part of religion. It is certain that mere positive institutions are not founded on any moral reason of the actions themselves: if they were, they might easily be drawn from these general precepts without the help of a positive command; for the whole moral reason of religion is either the love of God or the love of our neighbor: and to make any thing else to be religion, strictly speaking, that does not partake of this moral reason, is ignorance and superstition.

But then there is a very manifest difference between religion and the means of religion: and whatever is part of our religion, and yet not so on the account of the moral reason, can only be esteemed as a means of religion; not ordained for its own sake, but for the sake of that religion which is founded on moral reason.

This distinction between religion and the means of religion would be of use, if carefully attended to: it would teach men where to point their best endeavor, and where to place their hopes and expectations; for if your zeal and fervor be spent only on the means of religion, and goes no farther, ye are still in your sins.

And from hence it is plain that there can be no competition between the duties called moral and those called positive: for if the positive duties are the means and instruments appointed by God for preserving true religion and morality, true religion and morality can never be at variance with the means appointed to preserve them. And as to the obligation of observing these duties, it is on all sides equal: for since we are bound to obey God by all the ties of moral duty, and since the institutions of religion are of God's appointment, whatever the matter of the institution be, the obligation to obey is certainly a moral obligation: which, duly considered, will show that the text extends to all parts of religion, and that 'on these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XIV.

HEBREWS, CHAP. III.—VERSE 12.

PART I.

THE text evidently contains an earnest exhortation, the subject of which is faith towards God; for faith is the principle destroyed by *an evil heart of unbelief:* but some think that faith is not a proper subject of exhortation, since it is a mere act of the mind judging on motives of credibility; and it is as reasonable to exhort a man to see with his eyes, as to judge with his understanding: the warmest admonition will not enlarge the sight, &c.; and in faith the case is much the same.

If then this be the true notion of faith, how comes it that in every page we find praises of it in the gospel? What is there in this to deserve the blessings promised to the faithful? Whence is it that the whole of our salvation is put on this ground, and that so many prerogatives belong to faith, if faith be nothing else but the believing things in themselves credible? Why are we not said to be justified by sight, as well as by faith?

But farther: if faith be what has been stated, how comes it described in Scripture as having its seat in the heart? here shown that it is so described in various instances: hence it is necessary, for the right understanding of the text, to inquire what is the true notion of faith: from which will appear the

propriety of the exhortation, *Take heed, lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief.*

With respect to the true notion of faith, every step by which we advance to the last degree of perfection in it, is an act of faith, though of a different kind, and not entitled to the praises or rewards of the gospel: hence much of that confusion and inconsistency which has obscured the question. To render this more plain, the degrees and steps of faith by which men arrive at gospel righteousness are considered: for instance, a belief in the gospel accounts—a belief in the miracles of Christ and his apostles—a belief that the Spirit of God was given to them without measure: but no one of these degrees is the exact faith we seek after—that faith which is the principle of the gospel, respects the declarations and promises of God, and includes a firm reliance on him for the performance: beyond this there is no farther act of faith: this is its completion, and leads us to the practice of virtue as the condition on which the promises are founded. It is shown that natural religion requires almost the same faith, without giving us the same evidence: the professor of any religion must believe that God is a rewarder of them who diligently seek him: is it then become less credible that God will reward the righteous, because he has sent his Son to declare his full purpose to do so? Is it harder to trust him now, since he has appeared in signs and mighty works, than when we saw him only by the glimmering light of nature? &c.

Religion is a struggle between sense and faith: the temptations to sin are present pleasures; the incitements to virtue are future joys: these only seen by faith; those the objects of every sense: where the heart is established in faith, virtue triumphs over the works of darkness; where sense predominates, sin enters through every evil passion of the heart: hence not more absurd to say we are saved by faith, than that we are ruined by sense and passion. With this account of

faith, the Apostle's definition, *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen*, shown to agree.

Since then all the blessings of holiness and hopes of religion are founded in faith, is it not natural to say that he who follows after holiness, induced by the glorious prospects of futurity, is saved by faith? This subject enlarged on.

Where faith is not strong enough to bring the things of futurity into competition with present pleasures, the world must triumph, and the sinner be lost for want of faith. On the other hand, what is it that makes men willingly endure afflictions and persecutions, though they know that pleasure is better than pain, ease than torment? What but faith in God, which makes them esteem his promises, as if present before their eyes? This point enlarged on, and illustrated by instances from Scripture.

Hence then it is easy to understand what the Scripture means by *faith overcoming the world:* for religion is a contest between the world and faith, between things present and things to come. With this notion of faith, what St. Paul says in his comparison between faith, hope, charity, and other spiritual gifts, is shown to agree; and from this account we may also perceive how the heart comes to have such an influence in a Christian's faith. It is the love of the world that is the enemy of faith; and is not the heart of man the magazine from which the world supplies itself with arms? are not lust, envy, &c., the evil treasure of an evil heart, and the fiercest combatants against faith? and may not a heart so stocked be styled *a heart of unbelief?*

In other matters of faith which are of a more abstract nature, and depend more on the reason and judgment, the heart too often interposes with success: even here we have reason to remember the apostolical admonition in the text.

PART II.

Consideration of the character given in the text of an unbelieving heart; viz. that it makes us depart from the living God. On this subject three heads:—I. it is for want of faith, as a principle of religion, that men *depart from the living God:* II. faith cannot be such a principle, until it has its effects and operations in the heart: III. the motions and operations of the heart are greatly under our own power and government. Hence it will appear how much it is the business of a religious life to be watchful over the heart, &c.

On the first head, it is shown what is meant by *departing from God* by equivalent expressions in the chapter of which the text is a part: the propriety of which expressions will appear, if we consider God, as represented by the parable of the Prodigal, in the character of the father of the family, and sinners as prodigal sons, who forsake his house, and seduced by luxury and riot, enter into the service of strange masters, till the sense of want and misery brings them back to beg admittance again: so the nations of old forsook the service of their heavenly Father for strange deities, and became apostates and slaves: when they received the gospel, it was not taking a new master, but returning to their old one, and yielding an obedience that was always due. Since then by faith in the gospel we become servants of the living God, and are once more entered into his family, it is easy to see why the text charges an unbelieving heart with apostacy from the living God: for if Christian faith unites us to him, whatever destroys this principle dissolves the union; and we cannot lose our faith without departing from God.

But may not the heart possibly depart from God, through the influence of vice and pleasure, while faith stands uncorrupted? We see many, whose life is a continued scene of guilty enjoyments, who yet profess to believe the doctrines of the gospel,

and, for ought we know, do believe them: but the gospel says, *every one that believeth shall be saved, and all the workers of iniquity shall be destroyed:* if then these characters can subsist together, the gospel contains a contradiction.

The difficulty here shown to arise from confounding together ideas which are distinct; from not distinguishing between faith, as a principle of knowlege, and as a principle of religion: this point enlarged on: the knowlege of God is like other natural knowlege, as long as it resides in the head only; to become a principle of religion it must descend into the heart, and teach us to love the Lord *with all our minds*, &c.; and if this be true of the knowlege of God, which is the greatest of all divine truths, it must be true in all other instances; the faith then of the gospel, to which the wicked man is a stranger, is that which makes us *cleave steadfastly to the Lord with full purpose of heart.*

On the second head, if we consider religion under the notion of action, this proposition has nothing strange in it; as the same is true of every principle of knowlege and action; is as true of *sense* as it is of *faith.* As faith makes us cleave to God, so sense makes us cleave to the world; but till sense has possession of the heart, it has no power, is of no use to *the world:* we learn from sense the reality of things temporal: yet this assent of the mind to the evidence of sense never made a man wicked or worldly-minded: but when sense stirs up the desires of the heart, then it becomes a principle of action, and a combatant for the world against the powers of faith. As is the wicked man with regard to his faith in divine truths, so is the righteous man in respect to things of sense: as the wicked man has the knowlege of faith, but nothing religious, so has the righteous man all the knowlege of sense, but nothing sensual; the difference between them is, that the one pursues objects of sense, the other objects of faith. This parallel traced farther, to gain a right conception of the nature of faith: it is shown

that, to make a man perform the actions either of religion or of common life, his desires, which are the springs of action, must be moved; and since nothing can move the desires, which is not first the object of the understanding, he must have the knowlege of the things of this life and of religion, and consider them under the notion of good or evil with respect to himself. Now to enjoy the things of this life is the business of the sensual man; those of a future life are the good man's concern. As the objects are different, so the means of obtaining the knowlege of them are different: the world has as many ways of making itself familiar to us, as we have senses: religion has only those dark glimpses of futurity, which reason, feeble as she is, can discover: the only thing then that is wanting to set religion on as high ground, and to enable it to bear up against the impressions of sense, is a certain principle of knowlege with respect to its objects: for could we as evidently possess ourselves of the reality of the things of another life, as of the things of this, there would be no more competition between sense and religion than there is comparison between the things of this life and of eternity. To supply this darkness of our knowlege in religion, is the very end and design of revelation. Now, as sense is to be distinguished into a principle of knowlege and a principle of action, so is faith likewise: this distinction in the case of sense may be seen in any instance: an honest man knows the value of riches, as well as a thief: it is not therefore the knowlege of the object, but the immoderate desire of it, that makes the difference. The same is the case in religion: faith, as a mere object of the mind, is no principle of religion; and one is no more a religious man for knowing the articles of religion, than he is a sensual man for walking with his eyes open and seeing the world: this point enlarged on.

On the whole, since religion is not a mere science and speculation, but is to be the employment of our lives, in the

love of God and man; since the knowlege of any thing, or belief of any thing, as mere acts of the mind, are no principles of action; but every action proposes to itself some end, which is the object of some desire; it follows that faith cannot be a principle of religion, till it becomes the object of our desires, i. e. till it has its effects and operations in the heart.

The great advantage which the world has over religion lies in the certainty and reality of its objects: to supply this defect in religion, revelation assures us of the reality of things future, to influence and keep steady our affections. The objects of faith then support religion, as the objects of sense encourage the love of the world.

All the articles of the gospel tend to one of these ends; either to assure us of the certainty of the revelation and redemption by Christ, or to set before us the very substance and image of the things hoped for: this enlarged on: to reject therefore these articles, is to reject the revelation and redemption of Christ, and to act purely on the ground of natural religion.

The third head is a plain case, in which every man's own experience is his best instructor. We find daily that we can check our passions and inclinations, to serve the purposes of this life; and if we would do as much for that which is to come, we should answer all which the text requires of us *in taking heed of an evil heart of unbelief.* Were it not in our power to suspend the influence of our passions, a man would have no more liberty than a stone, and consequently would be incapable of religion: though we cannot see things as we will, it is in our power to pursue and court them as we please: we can make our inclinations yield to our will, as men do when they sacrifice present enjoyments to distant prospects of honor or preferment; for the future things of this life are no more objects of sense than those of another life; and it is not sense,

but judgment, that refuses the present good for a distant advantage: it is but an instance of the same reason and judgment to restrain the sensual appetites, and to make room for the hopes of immortality to enter and possess the heart: and this is truly the work of religion.

DISCOURSE XIV.

HEBREWS, CHAP. III.—VERSE 12.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.

PART I.

THE words of the text contain an earnest exhortation, as is evident on the first view: and the subject of the exhortation is faith towards God; for faith is the principle destroyed by an 'evil heart of unbelief.' But faith, as some think, is no proper subject for exhortation: for if faith is a mere act of the mind judging on motives of credibility, it is as reasonable to exhort a man to see with his eyes, as to judge with his understanding; and the warmest admonition will not enlarge the sight, which will still depend on the goodness of the eye, and the distance and position of the object. In faith the case is much the same: if the affections are thoroughly raised, and made eager to embrace the faith, they may chance indeed to step in between the premises and conclusion, and make men profess to believe, without knowing or considering the reasons of belief; which is to destroy the foundation of faith: or, if they keep their due distance, and leave the cause to be decided by reason and understanding, their influence will be nothing, and they might as well have been left out of the case; since faith will follow the judgment the mind makes on the motives of credibility.

But then, if this be the true notion of faith, that it is merely an act of the mind assenting to a truth on motives of credibility, how comes it that in every page we find the praises of it in the gospel? What is there in this to deserve the blessings promised to the faithful? Or, whence is it that the whole of our salvation

is put on this foot? Abraham, we are told, 'was justified by faith, and by faith inherited the promises: by faith we become the sons of Abraham, and heirs together with him of the hope which is through Christ Jesus: by faith we have admittance to God, and are intitled through the Spirit of adoption to cry Abba, Father: by faith we are delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God: by faith we wait for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.' But how come all these prerogatives to belong to faith, if faith be nothing else but believing things in themselves credible? Why are we not said to be justified by sight, as well as by faith? For is there not the same virtue in seeing things visible, as in believing things credible? Is not the understanding as faulty when it rejects things credible, as the eye when it does not perceive things visible? Tell me then what is faith, that it should raise men above the level of mortality, and make them become like the angels of heaven?

But farther; if faith be only an act of the understanding formed on due reasons and motives, how comes it to be described in Scripture as having its seat in the heart? The Apostle in the text cautions against 'an evil heart of unbelief:' and the same notion prevails throughout the books of Scripture, and is as early as our Saviour's first preaching. In explaining the parable of the sower to his disciples, Luke viii. he tells them, 'Those by the way-side are they that hear: then cometh the devil, and taketh away the word out of their hearts, lest they should believe and be saved:' v. 12. So again, 'That on the good ground are they which in an honest and good heart hear the word, and bring forth fruit with patience:' v. 15. The first sort are those who had an 'evil heart of unbelief:' the second are those who, as the same Apostle to the Hebrews expresses it, chap. x. had a 'true heart in full assurance of faith.' In the Acts of the Apostles, Philip tells the Eunuch, that if he 'believed with all his heart,' he might be baptized: viii. 37. And Barnabas exhorts the Antiochians, 'that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord;' which is only a periphrasis for faith: xi. 23. The Apostle to the Romans has *ex professo* determined this matter: 'If thou shalt confess,' says he, 'with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that

God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved:' x. 9. In the following verse he gives this general reason for his assertion: 'For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.'

Since then the Scripture, read to you for the text, contains an exhortation to faith, which supposes a man's faith to be influenced by his affections and inclinations; which is not always true, if we consider faith merely as the assent of the mind to a credible proposition: since there are also such things ascribed to faith in Scripture, such promises made to it, as cannot belong to it in this acceptation: since faith, thus considered, is a bare act of the mind; but the faith of the gospel is described as having its seat and operations in the heart of man: it is necessary, for the right understanding of the text, to inquire,

First, What is the true notion of faith.

From whence, in the second place, it will appear that it is a proper exhortation, 'Take heed, lest there be in us an evil heart of unbelief.'

The first thing to be inquired after is the true notion of faith.

Every step by which we advance to the last degree of perfection in faith, is an act of faith, though of a different kind, and not intitled either to the praises or rewards of the gospel. And hence has arisen great part of the confusion which has obscured and darkened this question concerning faith: for when men, not distinguishing between the intermediate acts of faith, and that faith which is the ultimate end and perfection of the gospel, ascribe that to one, which only and properly belongs to the other, no wonder if they are found inconsistent with themselves, and destroyers of reason and religion, whilst they seem to themselves to labor for the promotion of the doctrine of righteousness.

To render what I mean plain and intelligible, I desire you to consider the degrees and steps of faith by which men arrive at gospel righteousness. It is one degree of faith to believe the gospels to be true and faithful accounts; and it is a degree that leads to great perfection; he that wants this faith is at a stand, and can never proceed farther. But this is not the faith we seek after. It is a farther degree of faith, to believe the mi-

racles of Christ and his apostles to be true and real miracles, and wrought by the power and Spirit of God. But neither is this faith complete: for the miracles were wrought, not for their own sakes, but for the sake of something else: and therefore to believe the miracles, without believing what the miracles were intended to prove, is not Christian faith. Farther still; it is another and a more advanced degree of faith to believe that the Spirit of God was given to the apostles in a large measure, and to Christ, the author of the salvation, without measure. But neither is this the faith which Christ came to propagate: for should I ask you, why are we taught, and why are we to believe, that God gave the Spirit to his Son without measure, and to the disciples in a very wonderful manner and degree? would you not easily answer, that these heavenly endowments were both given and declared to make them fit teachers, and us ready disciples, of the doctrines of God? It is evident then that these gifts were subservient to a farther end, and that Christian faith does not terminate here. But if, notwithstanding this, you will apply all that you read of faith in holy Scripture to these or any of these kinds of faith, and then imagine that faith is a very strange principle of religion, and of foreign growth, repugnant to the sense and reason of mankind, and disclaimed by the light of nature; which are the usual compliments bestowed on it in the world; you may thank yourself for the delusion: the doctrine of the gospel of Christ is clear of the reproach.

Faith, which is the principle of the gospel, respects the promises and declarations of God, and includes a sure trust and reliance on him for the performance. Beyond this there is no farther act of faith. We are not taught to believe this in order to our believing something else: but here faith has its full completion, and leads immediately to the practice of virtue and holiness, the conditions in which all the promises of God are founded. For this end was the Son of God revealed, to make known the will of his Father, to declare his mercy and pardon, and to confirm the promises of eternal life to mankind: he that believes and accepts this deliverance from the bondage of sin, and through patience and perseverance in well-doing waits for the blessed hope of immortality; who passes through this

world as a stranger and pilgrim, looking for another country, and a city whose builder is God; this is he whose faith shall receive the promise, whose confidence shall have great recompence of reward.

If these are hard sayings, what defence shall we make for natural religion, which requires almost the same faith, but without giving the same evidence? Is it not the profession of every religion to believe God to be a rewarder of them who diligently seek him? Could you have any natural religion without this principle? This the gospel requires of you: and if Jesus Christ has given you more evidence for this faith than ever nature could afford her children, forgive him this injury. Is it become less credible that God will reward the righteous, because he has sent his Son into the world to declare his full purpose so to do? Is it harder to trust him now, since he has appeared to us in signs and in wonders and in mighty works, than it was before, when we saw him only by the glimmering light of nature? Are the express promises of God, confirmed to us in Christ Jesus, of less weight than the general suggestions of nature? If these express promises, these clear evidences of the purpose of God are not the things complained of in the gospel, what are they? Faith has ever been the principle of religion, and must ever continue so to be: for when all other gifts shall cease, faith, hope, and charity will be the only gospel graces which time shall not destroy.

Religion is a struggle between sense and faith. The temptations to sin are the pleasures of this life: the incitements to virtue are the pleasures of the next. These are only seen by faith; those are the objects of every sense. On the side of virtue all the motives, all the objects of faith engage: on the side of vice stand the formidable powers of sense, passion, and affection. Where the heart is established in the fulness of faith, the heavenly host prevails, and virtue triumphs over all the works of darkness: but where sense governs, sin enters, and is served by every evil passion of the heart. If this be the case; if religion has nothing to oppose to the present allurements of the world, but the hopes and glories of futurity, which are seen only by faith; it is no more absurd to say men are saved by faith, than it is to say they are ruined by sense and

passion; which we all know has so much of truth in it, that it can have nothing of absurdity.

To this account of faith, the definition which the Apostle has given of it (in the eleventh chapter to the Hebrews) exactly agrees: 'Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' 'Things hoped for' are the things of futurity, things which are not seen, as we learn from St. Paul, Rom. viii. 24. 'We are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth why doth he yet hope for?' Now without faith there can be no hope: for if we do not believe things future, we cannot possibly hope for them. Hope therefore is indebted to faith for all its objects: for these things with respect to hope would be mere nonentities, were it not for faith. Considered therefore as things hoped for, they owe their substance and their being to faith. 'Faith' then 'is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.' 'The things not seen' are those good things which God has prepared for them who love him, the rewards of virtue and holiness, which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath the heart of man conceived. And that these things are chiefly meant by the Apostle, is evident from the great number of instances subjoined in this chapter, in which the thing not seen is generally the promise of God, that is, the thing promised by God. Now the promises of God being objects neither of sense nor science, but such things as are made known to us by his declaration, the evidence on which they are received is the evidence of faith. The reason why we believe there are such rewards is, because we believe the word of God: the reason why we hope to receive them is, because we judge 'him faithful who has promised.'

Since then all the blessings of holiness, all the hopes of religion, are founded in faith, is it not very natural to say, that the man who follows after holiness and piety, induced by the glorious prospects of futurity, is saved by faith? that he who sacrifices the world and its enjoyments to the hopes of eternity, depending intirely on the truth of God, that he will perform the word which is gone out of his month, is saved by his faith, without which he could have had no hopes, no expectations, to place against the present enjoyments of the world? Do but

consider the posture of mind a man is in, when he deliberates on the good and evil of his own actions, and is determining his choice whether to follow the pleasures of sin, or to endure the hardships and fatigues of virtue: what are his motives, what are his deliberations? Is not the whole contest between things present and things to come, the realities of this life, and the uncertainty of the other? Most certainly this is the whole debate: for put the things of this life and the next on the same foot of certainty and reality, and there is no man fool enough to deliberate in his choice. Were the glories of heaven the object of sense; could we with the eyes of flesh look up to the throne of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and 'discern the innumerable company of angels, the general assembly and church of the first-born, which are written in heaven, and God the judge of all, and the spirits of just men made perfect, and Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel:' could we have this view, a man would no more part with his inheritance above, for the short enjoyments of sin, than he would sell the reversion of an earthly crown for one morsel of meat. The cause of sin therefore is never argued on the comparison between the glories of heaven and the pleasures of life. No wicked man was ever so weak as to say, it is better for me to eat, drink, and be merry this day and the next, than to reign in eternal glory and immortality. But thus he reasons:—the things about me are present and real: I see, I feel the world; and every sense directs me to the enjoyment of it: but for heaven, where is it? Distant it is, I am sure, and out of sight; and perhaps is only a delusion of sickly imagination. When this reasoning prevails, as too often it does, tell me, I beseech you, is it not a victory gained by sense over the power of faith? Had faith been strong enough to have placed in view the substance of things hoped for, to have made evident the things not seen, could the world so easily have prevailed? I trust it could not; for the things of faith as much excel the things of sense, as the heavens are higher than the earth.

But where faith is not strong enough to make a competition between the things of futurity and the present pleasures, the world must triumph, and the sinner will be lost for want of

faith. On the other side, what is it that makes men willingly endure afflictions and persecutions? Do you think the righteous man so very silly as not to know that pleasure is better than pain, ease and tranquillity to be preferred to vexation and torment? Can you imagine that he chooses oppression for oppression's sake? No, certainly: but his faith, his trust and confidence in God, make him esteem the promises of God as if they were present before his eyes; to the hopes of them he sacrifices the world; and after the example of his great Master, the author and finisher of our faith, 'for the joy that is set before him, endures the cross, despising the shame.' Thus Moses by faith, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, 'choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.' Mark the reason which follows, and the power of his faith: 'esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompence of reward. By faith also he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king.' But what confidence was this? What forces, what allies, had he to support him against the united strength of Egypt? Thus sense indeed would reason. But 'through faith he endured, as seeing him who is invisible:' though he had no visible protector, yet through faith he saw the hand of God stretched out for his deliverance. This was his confidence, this his support.

Towards the close of this eleventh chapter the Apostle sings the triumphs of faith under all the cruelties of men: 'Others,' says he, 'were tortured; and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover, of bonds and imprisonments; they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword; they wandered about in sheep-skins and goat-skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented.' All these persisted in faith, 'not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.' The resurrection was a state they had never seen; it was what they could only hope for: but the promise of God was to them more than the evidence of sight; and to their trust and confidence in him they willingly gave up all that their eyes beheld, and submitted to the evils which sense is ever warning us against.

From this account it will be easy to understand what the Scripture means, when it tells us 'that faith overcometh the world:' for religion is a contest between the world and faith, between things present and things to come. Faith puts us under the conduct of future hopes and fears, exempts us from the power and influence of things present: which present things are the world: and therefore it is properly said of faith, 'that it overcometh the world.'

To this notion of faith agrees likewise what St. Paul has said concerning it in his comparison between faith, hope, and charity, and other spiritual gifts, such as speaking with tongues, prophesying, and healing of distempers. These shall cease: 'But now remaineth,' says the Apostle, 'faith, hope, and charity: and the greatest of these is charity:' for charity and universal benevolence is the very grace and ornament of heaven, the employment and the pleasure of blessed spirits. Nor can faith and hope ever be parted from true religion: for there is no being so great as not to depend on faith in God, and trust in his power and wisdom, or to be above hoping any thing from his goodness and benevolence. And therefore the Apostle says expressly of faith and hope, that they shall remain, with charity, the greatest of the three. Other gifts are bestowed for the service of the Church, such as tongues, miracles, and the like; and they may well cease, when the occasion which required them ceases; but faith, hope, and charity are not occasional gifts, but are essential to religion, and must continue as long as religion itself.

From this account we may perceive likewise how the heart comes to have such an interest and influence in the faith of a Christian. It is the love of the world that is the enemy of faith: and is not the heart of man the very magazine from which the world supplies itself with arms? Where dwell self-love, lust, envy, and covetousness, are not these the evil treasure of an evil heart? and are not these the fiercest combatants against faith? and may not a heart thus stocked be properly styled 'a heart of unbelief?'

In other matters of faith, which seem to be of a more abstracted nature, and to depend intirely on the reason and judgment of men, the heart often interposes with too much success:

for these are so nearly related to the faith which subdues the world and the heart, that the heart watchful for itself and the world, disturbs the mind, and raises such clouds of passion, as intercept the light of truth. To believe Christ to be the Son of God, to have dwelt for ever in the glory of his Father, from thence to have come to our redemption, and to have published the faith in signs and wonders and mighty works, are such killing blows to the love of the world, that the heart cannot be unconcerned whilst these things are debating: and though they can only be tried at the bar of reason, yet the heart will be counsel on one side or other: and even in these cases there is reason to remember the apostolical admonition, 'Take heed, lest there be in you an evil heart of unbelief.'

DISCOURSE XIV.

PART II.

I PROCEED to consider the character given in the text of an unbelieving heart; namely, that it makes us 'depart from the living God.' What may be proper to be said on this subject may be reduced, I think, under these three heads:

First, to show, that it is for want of faith, considered as a principle of religion, that men 'depart from the living God.

Secondly, that faith cannot be a principle of religion, until it has its effects and operations in the heart.

Thirdly, that the motions and operations of the heart are in great measure under our own power and government.

And from hence it will evidently appear, how much it is the business and concern of a religious life to be watchful over the heart, to guard against all such affections as will destroy the influence of faith, and render the heart incapable of receiving the impressions of the Spirit of God.

First then, we are to show, that it is for want of faith, considered as a principle of religion, that men 'depart from the living God.' What is meant by 'departing from God' will

appear by comparing this with other equivalent expressions made use of in this chapter. In the eighth verse the Apostle introduces the Holy Ghost speaking in the language of the Psalmist, and thus forewarning the people, 'Harden not your hearts.' In the tenth verse God complains of the rebellious Israelites in the wilderness, saying, 'They do always err in their hearts, and they have not known my ways.' In the verse immediately after the text the Apostle thus explains his meaning: 'But exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.' So then, to be hardened in heart, to err in heart, not to know or walk in the ways of God, to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin, are one and the same thing as departing from the living God: and the meaning of these figurative expressions is clearly explained in the seventeenth verse: 'But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned?' As sinners are said 'to depart from God,' so those who forsake sin, and are converted, are said, in the language of Scripture, to 'turn to God.' Of the holy Baptist, who came preaching repentance from dead works, it was foretold that he 'should turn many to the Lord their God:' Luke i. 16. And the Apostles Paul and Barnabas thus describe the purpose and end of their mission: 'We preach unto you, that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God:' Acts xiv. 15.

The propriety of these expressions will appear, if we consider God, under the representation made of him by our Saviour in the parable of the prodigal, as the Father of the family; and sinners as prodigal sons, who, weary of their Father's government, forsake his house, and reduced by luxury and riot, enter into the service of strange masters, till the sense of want and their own misery bring them back to beg admittance again into their Father's house. Thus the nations of old forsook the service of God, their heavenly Father, and fell under the hard bondage of strange deities: they were apostates from him who had a right to their obedience, and slaves to those who had no dominion over them: when they received the gospel, it was not putting themselves under a new master, but returning to their old one, and yielding that obedience

which was always due, though never paid before. Since therefore by faith in the gospel of Christ we become the servants of the living God, and are once more entered into his family, it is easy to apprehend the reason why the Apostle in the text charges an unbelieving heart with apostacy from the living God: for if Christian faith be the principle by which we are united to the living God, whatever destroys this principle does at the same time dissolve the union; and we cannot make shipwreck of the faith without departing from God. An unbelieving heart therefore, that is, a heart void of Christian faith, is guilty of apostacy.

But you may ask perhaps, may not the heart possibly depart from God through the solicitations of vice and pleasure, and faith at the same time stand sound and uncorrupted? And there is this ground for putting the question, that we see many men who are buried in wickedness, whose life is but one continued scene of guilty enjoyments, who sacrifice their honor, their faith, and their religion, to lust, covetousness, or intemperance; who yet profess to believe all the doctrines of the gospel, and do really believe them, for aught that any man knows to the contrary, But when I reflect on the express declarations of the gospel, 'that every one who believeth shall be saved, that all the workers of iniquity shall be destroyed;' if these characters can subsist together, if the same person at the same time may be both a believer and a worker of iniquity, there is a greater contradiction in the gospel than any that has yet been pretended by its keenest enemies.

How must we then account for this difficulty? The true answer, I think, is, that the difficulty arises from confounding and blending together ideas which are perfectly distinct, from not separating between faith considered as a principle of knowlege, and as a principle of religion. In common life we know many things on the evidence of faith: such are the things which we receive on the authority of historical evidence, or on the report and testimony of credible witnesses: and such influence has this principle of knowlege in the world, that there is hardly any thing of consequence that is not determined by it. There is not a trial that affects either our lives or our fortunes, the issue of which does not depend on this principle of knowlege,

the judge and the jury not being supposed to have the evidence of their own senses in the facts which come under their determination. I mention this to put it out of dispute that faith is one of the sources or principles of our knowlege. Now mere speculative knowlege has nothing in it of moral good or evil: a man is not better or worse for what he knows, till he comes to act, or to be influenced to action by his knowlege. Bare knowlege therefore is nothing akin to religion; for religion is not one of those very indifferent things, which has neither good nor evil in it. The speculative knowlege therefore of truths depending on divine testimony is mere knowlege, and not religion; for there is no difference in the simple act of the mind, whether the assent be grounded on divine testimony or human testimony; unless you think that every thing must be religion, that depends on our belief of the being of God: which is not true; because there may be this belief, where there can be no religion; for St. James has told us, 'that the devils believe and tremble.' Now the wicked man's faith can be nothing more but this speculative knowlege or belief of divine truths: for it is evident it has no effect, no influence; and is therefore so far from being the saving faith of the gospel, that it is not in any degree religious. Our Lord in the gospel has given us a short description of religion, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and thy neighbor as thyself.' Now, in order to love God, we must know him and his attributes; in order to love our neighbor, we must know our neighbor and his condition: and there is just as much religion in knowing God without loving and obeying him, as there is in knowing our neighbor without loving or regarding him. The man who believes God, and pretends to a right faith in divine matters, and lives in the neglect of God, in contempt of his commands, and sins in defiance of knowlege, has just as much faith as the priest and the Levite had charity, who saw their neighbor stripped and wounded, and lying half-dead in the road, and 'looked on him, and passed by on the other side.' The knowlege of God is but like other natural knowlege, as long as it has its residence in the head only: to become a principle of religion, it must descend into the heart, and teach us to 'love the Lord with all our minds, with all

our souls, and with all our strength;' and if this be true of the knowlege of God, which is the first and greatest of all divine truths, it must be true in all other instances whatever. The faith then of the gospel, and which the wicked man is an utter stranger to, is that faith which makes us 'cleave steadfastly to the Lord with full purpose of heart.' And this will farther appear under the second head, which was to show,

Secondly, that faith cannot be a principle of religion, till it has its effect and operation in the heart. If we consider religion under the notion of action, this proposition has, I think, nothing strange or surprising in it: for it is not only true of faith, but of every principle of knowlege and action: it is altogether as true of sense, as it is of faith. As faith makes us cleave to God, so sense makes us cleave to the world: but till sense has possession of the heart, it has no power or efficacy, and is of no use and service to the world. We learn from sense the existence and reality of things temporal: but this assent of the mind to the evidence of sense never made any man wicked or worldly-minded: for if it did, no man would ever be righteous; for the best man that ever was in the world had his knowlege of external things from the evidence of sense. But when sense stirs the desires and affections of the heart, then it becomes a principle of action, and a fierce combatant for the world against the powers of faith. If we remember what was said of the wicked man with regard to his faith and persuasion about divine truths, we shall find how exactly the righteous man is in the same case in respect to sensible things: as the wicked man has the knowlege of faith, but nothing religious, so has the righteous man all the knowlege of sense, but nothing sensual: the difference therefore between a sensual man and a righteous man does not consist in this, that one knows most of sensible things, and the other most of divine things, for this in both cases may be and often is false: but it lies in this, that one pursues the objects of sense, the other the objects of faith.

To trace this parallel between sense and faith a little farther, may give us perhaps a true conception of the nature of faith, the thing we seek after. Let us consider then how the case stands between sense and faith, things present and things to come, between sensuality and religion. The desires which God

has planted in our nature, are the springs of action; and we always propose the obtaining some end, which is the object of some desire, in every thing we do. It is evident then, that where there is nothing to move and incite our desires, we must be unconcerned and inactive. All objects of our desires are first objects of the understanding, according to the known saying of the poet, *ignoti nulla cupido.* But there are many objects of the mind which are never objects of the passions; for the mind must not only apprehend the thing, but likewise apprehend it as a real thing, and as having the relation of good or evil to a man, before it can have any effect on our inclinations. From this account it is plain, that to make a man perform the actions either of religion or of common life, his desires, which are the springs of action, must be moved: and since nothing can move the desires, which is not first the object of the understanding, he must have the knowlege of the things of this life, and of religion, and consider them under the notion of good or evil with respect to himself.

Now the enjoyment of the things of this world is the business and employment of the sensual man; the good things of futurity and another life are the religious man's care and concern. As the objects are of different kinds, so the means of obtaining the knowlege of the objects are likewise different. Things present are represented to our minds by every sense; the things of futurity by no sense; and in this single point lies the great advantage which the world has over religion. The world has as many ways of making itself familiar to us, as we have senses: religion* has only the dark glimpse of futurity, such as reason, in its present feeble and low condition, can discover. The only thing then that is wanting to set religion on as good a foot as the world, and to make it able to bear up against the impressions of sense, is a certain principle of knowlege with respect to the objects of religion: for could we as evidently possess ourselves of the reality of the things of another life, as we are possessed of the reality of the things of this, there would be no more competition between sense and religion, than there is comparison

* It is scarcely necessary to mention that natural religion is here meant.—Ed.

between the things of this life and of eternity. To supply this darkness of our knowlege in religion is the very end and design of revelation: for could we as plainly discern the good things of futurity, as we see and feel the good things present, there would be no more want of revelation to make us acquainted with the other world, than there is to make us acquainted with this. Now as sense is evidently to be distinguished into a principle of knowlege and a principle of action, so is faith likewise. We never esteem a man to be sensual or worldly-minded, merely because sense has furnished him with a comprehensive knowlege of sensible objects: so neither is a man to be accounted a religious man, because of that faith which flows from revelation, considered merely as a principle of religious knowlege. This distinction between sense as a principle of knowlege and a principle of action, may be seen in any or in every instance. An honest man knows the use and value of riches as well as a thief. It is not therefore the knowlege of the object, but the immoderate desire of it, that makes the difference; and one man may be justly hanged for stealing five pounds, and another be very innocent who had seen and examined the value of the mines of Peru. In religion the case is just the same: faith, as long as it continues to be a mere object of the mind, is no principle of religion; and one is no more a religious man for knowing the articles of religion, than he is a sensual man for walking with his eyes open and seeing the world. An unbelieving heart is the same thing in faith, that an antipathy is in sense, and supposes us rather to hate than not to know our duty. Many men are ruined by the love of wine and strong liquors. Stop but the passage to the heart, and these objects lose all their force and power, and a man sees the wine sparkle with less concern than he sees the moon shine. And this is the case of all those who have a natural aversion to strong drinks, which is no uncommon case. This aversion affects sense only as it is a principle of action, and leaves it free as it is the principle of knowlege: and in like manner the unbelieving heart destroys that faith which is the life and principle of religion, though it may not, perhaps, disturb the objects of faith, which have their residence in another place.

On the whole then, since religion is not a mere science and

speculation, but is to be the work and employment of our lives, and to exert itself in the love of God and our neighbor, as our blessed Saviour has taught us: since the knowlege of any thing, or the belief of any thing, considered merely as acts of the mind, are no principles of action; but every action proposes to itself some end, which is the object of some desire; it evidently follows that faith cannot be a principle of religion, till it becomes the object of our desires, that is, till it has its effects and operations in the heart. This notion of faith is not only probable, but necessary, on the view of our own nature, and the origin of all our actions, which arise in the same manner, whatever the principle of action be. Even sense works in the same manner, and, powerful as it is, has no effect till it has made its way to the heart, the seat of all our passions and affections. There, and there only, it prevails as a principle of action. Sense produces no sensuality, till it warms the affections with the pleasures of the world; and faith produces no religion till it raises the heart to love and to embrace its Maker.

The great advantage the world has over religion lies in the certainty and reality of its objects, which flow in on us at every sense. To supply this defect on the part of religion, revelation was given to assure us of the certainty and reality of things future; without which assurance they could have no effect or influence on our affections. The objects of faith then support religion in the same manner as the objects of sense promote and encourage the love of the world: and as there could be no sensual love of the world, if there were no objects of sense; so neither could there be any religion, where there are no articles of faith; for as, in general, there can be no desire where there is no knowlege, so, in particular, there can be no principle of faith, where there are no objects of faith.

All the articles of the gospel tend to one of these ends, either to assure us of the certainty of the revelation and redemption by Christ Jesus, or to set before us the very substance and image of the things hoped for. For this last purpose our Lord rose visibly from the grave, to give us the very evidence of sense for that part of our faith which seemed to be most contradictory to the experience of sense. For the first purpose, to assure us of the certainty of the revelation and redemption by Christ

Jesus, 'our Lord was declared to be the only begotten Son of God, the brightness of his Father's glory, and the express image of his person; by whom the worlds were made, and who upholdeth all things by the word of his power;' that we, knowing in whom we have trusted, might hold fast the confidence 'and profession of our faith without wavering: (for he is faithful that promised.)' When Christ was declared by the voice out of the cloud to be the Son of God, the same voice gave the reason of the declaration; 'This is my beloved Son, hear ye him:' Matt. xvii. 5. To reject therefore these articles of the gospel, is to reject the revelation and redemption of Christ, and to set out purely on the foot of natural religion. How reasonably you may do this, and how well it becomes your condition, the time will not permit me now to show.

These objects of faith are our motives and incitements to holiness and righteousness; and if we suffer them to have their due influence on our hearts, they produce that faith which is the life and spirit of a Christian, which unites him to God, and will entitle him to glory at the great day. How far it is in our power to promote or obstruct this influence, will appear under the last head, which was to show,

Thirdly, That the motions and operations of the heart are in great measure under our own power and government.

I shall not spend much of your time in a plain case, and in which every man's own experience is his best instructor. We find daily that we can check our passions and inclinations, to serve the purposes of this life; and if we would do as much for that which is to come, we should answer all that the Apostle in the text requires of us, when he exhorts us to 'take heed of an evil heart of unbelief.' Were it not in our power to suspend the influence of our passions, man would have no more freedom or liberty than a stone, and would, consequently, be utterly incapable of religion. It is not in our power to feel or not to feel the impressions of sense: our eyes, our ears, and every sense, present before us the objects of the world, whether we will or no; and if these objects can as uncontrollably take possession of our hearts, as they do of our minds and imaginations, all men must as necessarily follow the dictates of sense, as they admit the objects of sense: which would destroy, not

only the power of faith, but all moral virtue, all distinction of good and evil. But this is not the case: for though we cannot see things as we will, yet it is in our power to pursue and court them as we please: we can supple our inclinations, and make them yield to our will; as is evident in the many instances where men sacrifice their present enjoyments to the distant prospects of honor or preferment: for the future things of this life are no more the objects of sense than the things of another life; and it is not sense, but judgment, that refuses the present good for a distant advantage: and it is but an instance of the same reason and judgment to restrain the sensual appetites, and to make room for the hopes of immortality to enter in and possess the heart; and this is truly the work of religion. God has placed before us life and death, things present and things to come. If things temporal have this advantage, that 'they are seen;' yet the things which are not seen have this prerogative to balance that advantage, that 'they are eternal.' The truth of these things is founded both on reason and on the testimony of God. If we receive his testimony, it is well: but if we interest our hearts in the cause, and act as men resolved to secure to themselves these blessed hopes, then is our faith made perfect. And since this depends on the due regulation of our desires, which are subject to the will and judgment of man, it is plain that the true Christian faith is an internal principle, a religious habit and disposition of soul, which, like other good habits, depends on the care we take to preserve the innocence and purity of our hearts and minds. And this sufficiently shows the reasonableness and the sense of the Apostle's exhortation in the text: 'Take heed, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XV.

ACTS, CHAP. XV.—VERSES 1, 2.

WE learn from this and other texts, that from the earliest times controversies have existed in religion: even the authority of the Apostles was not sufficient to lay the heats and prejudices of men: they themselves, though agreed in the main point, differed in their methods of dealing with opposition, whence St. Paul says, 'he withstood Peter to the face.' To the same cause may be referred much of the obscurity found in the New Testament: passages are dark to us, because we know not the errors or misconceits which the holy penmen opposed, and how far they argue on the truth of Christianity, or on the concessions of their adversaries. Hence length of time, far from diminishing disputes, has rather enlarged the field of controversy; this is also increased by those passions and weaknesses from which the best of men are not free, and which often darken things clear in themselves; hence the difficulties of an honest Christian: whom shall he choose to follow? and when he has chosen, with what security and confidence can he proceed? In these difficulties, when urged as arguments against religion, two things are to be considered:—I. how far they affect the authority of the gospel, which, if it be so dark and obscure, that common honesty, with common sense, is unable to discern the will of God in it, cannot be designed by God as a measure of religion: II. with respect to ourselves, how we may attain to a certain Rule of Religion under the gospel revelation, notwithstanding many, and sometimes inex-

cusable, controversies. On the whole, if these difficulties appear not to affect the authority of the gospel, nor preclude us from a knowlege of the faith and obedience required under it, the controversies cannot in reason be urged as objections against revealed religion.

I. The authority of revelation depends on this, that it is the will and word of God; and he who knows that he possesses the word of God, knows he possesses a revelation of certain authority: hence arises the question, how far these two distinct acts of knowlege are attainable? that is, to know who spoke such or such words, and the true sense and import of them; since these are two independent things. This shown by ordinary cases, and by the parables which our Saviour delivered to his Apostles; so that in revelation the case is the same as in human laws; for a man may be certain of the authority of these, and yet be unable to expound them. This farther confirmed by the proper proofs of a revelation, and their operation on the mind prior to our distinctly understanding all its parts; this want of understanding being no objection to its authority, which is founded on proofs which the objection cannot reach; on the qualities of the person sent to make the revelation, or the main end and purpose of his coming, and on the miracles he gives in evidence of his commission: so that, although we do not fully comprehend it, we are bound to receive it as the word of God. Doctrines are not proved by miracles; miracles proving only the authority of the person, which is the ground of our receiving the doctrine; so that the authority of the person is one thing, and to know what he says another: his authority makes the law; our want of knowlege with regard to his meaning will not unmake it; otherwise ignorance would be the supreme authority. The question—why then should the law of God be obscure, which from its nature we must suppose was to be understood, and to be our rule of life—brings us to consider whether the supposed difficulties and

obscurities of the gospel render it unworthy of the wisdom of God. The Christian Revelation is contained in the books of the New Testament, which, being of different kinds, must be differently considered; had they been so considered, the difficulties of some parts would not have been urged as an objection to the revelation itself: these books are either historical, doctrinal, controversial, or a mixture of the two last. The first relate a plain and simple story, the different accounts of which vary no more than might naturally be expected from different pens: the second contain those matters of faith and rules of duty which regard not particular cases, but are intended for the use of the whole world: and these are most clearly expressed: take for example the honor and worship which we are enjoined to pay to God—the plain terms in which idolatry is condemned—the duties we owe to each other—or the peculiar benefits which we receive from Christ's death, God's pardon, assistance, &c.: all are declared without any obscurity; and with regard to them there is a perfect harmony among the inspired writers. Still it is said there are difficulties in Scripture: so there are; but they are such as do not interfere with the clear revelation made by Christ: and if there had been no disputes with the Jews or others, the difficulties contained in the third or controversial class, had not existed. St. Paul, as in duty bound, spoke of election or reprobation; but if he had not spoken of them, our gospel had not been less complete: but both he and the other apostles had to root out prejudices and errors which stood in the way of the gospel. Many difficulties arise from our applying things pointedly spoken by the apostles, to the general doctrines of Christianity. Hence many disputes in which men have forgot the plain parts of Scripture, to worry each other about obscure ones: this point enlarged on. There are other difficulties also which belong to religious men rather than religion; such as the disputes and nice inquiries of the schools; but what have these to do with

the gospel? so also there are doubts about the sacraments, how or what grace they may confer; but this one point is clear—*he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.* These difficulties however, it may be said, are so blended with the cause of religion, that they render the gospel of little use as a rule; the straightness of which by these means cannot be discerned by the generality of mankind: this leads us to the second head, i. e. a consideration *of these difficulties with respect to ourselves.* The Scriptures contain a plain intelligible system, and there would be no great difficulty if men would follow what they do and may understand, but they will make rules of life for themselves from passages which they fancy they understand, but do not: how is this to be counteracted? It is at every man's peril, if he makes any rule to himself, contrary to the plain express commands of God, which he does or may easily understand. Human and divine laws in this case compared, and the same shown to hold good. The understandings however of men being different, there may be a latitude even here, which we cannot determine, but which God, who is to be the judge, both can and will: and the great difficulty which men make in this case, seems to arise from their misapprehension of the judgment of God. Among men, all are judged by the same rule: no allowance is made for different capacities and circumstances: but all who are esteemed to have reason enough to govern themselves are concluded under one law: if then you consider the judgment of God to be like that of men, no wonder you ask how ignorant persons should come to the knowlege of their duty.

Conclusion: God, who, though he gave to all men one law, has given to each his peculiar capacity and share of reason, will judge accordingly; we may therefore safely trust this difficulty with God, and doubt not but he will judge righteously.

DISCOURSE XV.

ACTS, CHAP. XV.—VERSES 1, 2.

And certain men, which came down from Judea, taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem, unto the apostles and elders, about this question.

We learn from the text, and other parts of holy writ, that the earliest and purest times of the gospel were not free from disputes and controversies in religion: that the authority of the Apostles, though confirmed by signs and wonders, was not sufficient to lay the heats and prejudices of men; which, like ancient inhabitants, having possession and prescription to plead for their right, were with great difficulty removed: that the Apostles themselves, however agreed in one and the same doctrine, were of different opinions as to the prudential methods of dealing with the opposition they found; some giving way to the torrent, that men might have time to cool, and recover the calmness of reason and judgment; others endeavoring resolutely to stem the tide, and not to give way, 'no, not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue.' Hence arose the contest between Peter and Paul: so that, as the Apostle of the Gentiles himself tells us, 'he withstood Peter to the face.'

To the same cause likewise we may ascribe much of the present difficulty and obscurity of the books of the New Testament: for the writers being necessarily drawn into controversy

by this means, which always has, and in the nature of the thing must have, reference to the opinions and prejudices of the disputers; there are many things in Scripture which appear dark to us, for want of a distinct knowlege of the errors and misconceits which the writers oppose; many things delivered down to us, in which it is not easy at first sight to distinguish how far the holy Penman argues on the truth of our common Christianity, and how far on the principles and concessions of his adversary. From whence it has come to pass that some things have been taught by unskilful interpreters of Scripture, as the doctrines of Christianity, which were no better than the errors of judaizing converts.

These difficulties, thus woven into the holy writings, have furnished even to learned men constant matter of dispute and controversy; and some points have labored under a difference of opinion in most ages of the church: and so far has length of time been from diminishing these disputes, that every writer of name and authority has enlarged this field of controversy; and to examine, adjust, and expound the sentiments and opinions of men of renown in the church of God, who have gone before us, is left as an additional labor and study, and oftentimes as a fresh matter of contention.

Add to these causes already recited, the passions, the weaknesses, and prepossessions of mind, which the best of men are not free from; and which darken and obscure things in themselves oftentimes clear and intelligible; and you will have before you, perhaps, a just account of the causes which have filled the world with so many doubts and differences in opinion concerning the weightiest matters of religion.

But since from this account there appears little hope of coming to an intire harmony and agreement of opinion, what must an honest man do? Whom shall he choose to follow? And, when he has chosen, with what security and confidence can he proceed? since there will be always some to tell him that he is a blind follower of a blind leader. How far this difficulty has been pressed, even to the rendering all religion precarious and uncertain, and to the discarding the gospel itself, which is represented as encumbered with so many doubts, such different comments and expositions, that the wit of man knows not how

to extricate him from this labyrinth, and lead him to one spot of firm ground whereon to rest the sole of his feet; how far, I say, this argument has been urged to this purpose, I need not say: it will be more to our purpose to call this matter to a fair examination, and to assert the grounds and principles of our faith, notwithstanding this fierce assault that has been made on them.

Now there are two things which this argument leads us to consider; and which, when fairly stated, will, I think, exhaust the whole difficulty.

The first is with respect to the revelation itself; to consider how far these difficulties affect the authority of the gospel: for if it is, as it is represented, so very dark and obscure, that common honesty, with the assistance of common sense, cannot discern in it what is the will of God; then it cannot be a rule or measure of religion, or designed as such by God, who is too wise and too good to give laws to the world, which can be of no use to them, but to perplex and confound their understandings.

The second is with respect to ourselves; to consider how we may attain to a certain rule of religion under the gospel revelation, notwithstanding the many controversies and disputes, which are too visible to be denied, and oftentimes too fierce to be excused.

And if it shall appear on the whole, that these difficulties do not affect the authority of the gospel, nor preclude us from the certain knowlege of the faith and obedience required under the gospel; then, whatever use may be made of these controversies, they cannot in reason be urged as objections against revealed religion, the certainty of which, either as to its authority or the clearness of its doctrines, is no way impeached by them.

The first thing is, to consider the authority of revelation, and how it is affected by any difficulties or obscurities that are found in it.

The authority of revelation depends on this, that it is the will and word of God; and he that knows he has the word of God, knows that he has a revelation of certain authority. The first question then is, whether this knowlege may be attained,

before we have a distinct and explicit understanding of all the parts of the revelation? If it may, then it is certain that the obscurity of some parts of the revelation cannot destroy the authority of the whole. We know very well, in all ordinary cases, that these are two very distinct acts of knowlege, and not in the least dependent on one another, to know who spoke such words, and to know the true sense and import of those words. One man may certainly know who spoke them, though he knows not the meaning of them: another may know the meaning of them, without knowing who spoke them. In revelation the case is the same: our Saviour spoke many things in parables, which the disciples understood not, and which he afterwards explained to them. Now I would ask any man whether the disciples did not as certainly know that those parables were the word of Christ, before he explained them, as they did afterwards? If they did, those parables were to them of the same authority, though not of the same use, when they were obscure, as when they were explained. In human laws the case is the same: the authority of them depends not on their being distinctly understood by all men; for the man who has no ability to expound a statute, may yet be certain of its authority, if he will have recourse to the proper records. And there are many statutes of this realm, the authority of which no man doubts of, though at the same time those who are best able to judge are not agreed in the meaning and exposition of them: and what would you think of a man who should affirm that we have no statute-book in this kingdom, or none of any authority; and give you this reason for it, because that which we call our statute-book has many difficulties and obscurities in it, many things which are not to be reduced to a certain and determinate meaning? And yet the argument is as good, nay, just the same, in this case, as when it is applied to revelation; and a man argues with the same shrewdness, who tells us we have no gospel, or none that we ought to admit, because the gospel we pretend to has many difficult passages in it, many things that are hard to be understood: for the obscurity of some laws is as good an argument against the authority of the statute-book, as the obscurity of some texts is against the authority of the gospel.

This will farther appear to be true, if we consider the proper proofs of a revelation, and how they operate: for they will be found to take place, and have their full effect on the mind, antecedently to our having a distinct understanding of all the parts of a revelation: and consequently our not having a distinct understanding of all the parts of a revelation is no objection to the authority of a revelation, which is founded on proofs the objection cannot reach. Now these proofs are three: the qualities of the person who is sent to make the revelation: the main end and purpose of his coming: and the miracles which he gives in evidence of his commission. If the person be sufficiently qualified to be intrusted with so great a charge; if nothing appears to make it justly suspected that he is a deceiver; if no private views, no self-interest, no ambition are discoverable; if he be in all respects such an one as we may reasonably suppose God would make choice of to send on his errand: if the end and design of his coming is such as we may well suppose God to be the author of; if it tends to promote the honor of God and true religion, to secure the general happiness and welfare of mankind, without any partial views and regards: if his mission be attested by such signs and wonders as plainly point out to us the hand of God supporting and encouraging the work; if they are openly shown before friends and foes, and attended with such other circumstances as are necessary to place them above suspicion: in this case we have a certain evidence of the mission and authority of this person to make known to us the will of God, and are bound to receive what he shall publish in God's name as the law of God. Now all these proofs we certainly may have, without being able to understand or fully comprehend all that such a person delivers; and yet, in force of these proofs, we are bound to believe what he delivers to be the word of God. Men do not speak accurately when they say the doctrines are proved by miracles; for in truth there is no connexion between any miracles and doctrines; miracles prove the authority of the person, and the authority of the person is the ground of receiving the doctrine. Now it is one thing to know the authority of the person, another thing to know what he says. His authority makes what he says to be law, and your want of

knowlege in the meaning of what he says will not unmake the law: for if it could, ignorance would be the supreme authority, since no authority could make a law which ignorance could not repeal. How far we are concerned in these obscurities, or what obligations they lay on us, which perhaps may be none at all, is another question: but I think it is evident that no body of laws, human or divine, becomes void and of none effect, because some parts are hard to be understood, or not to be understood. And if men dispute on such places, and divide into a thousand opinions about them, such divisions do still less affect the law, which owes not its authority to the agreement or disagreement of interpreters.

But it may be said, and I think very justly, to what purpose is any thing delivered as law or revelation, which is too obscure to be understood? The very end of the law is, to be the rule of our actions; and how is this end to be attained whilst we continue ignorant of the meaning of the lawgiver? Men may blunder, and make dark laws, and so miss the scope they aimed at; and the wonder is not great: but how should any obscurity darken the law of God? since we cannot but suppose, from the very end and nature of a law, that his intention was to be understood; and his wisdom permits us not to doubt but that he was able to explain his meaning.

This brings us to consider the fact, whether the gospel has such difficulties and obscurities in it as may make us esteem it unworthy of the wisdom of God.

The Christian revelation is contained in the books of the New Testament; but they are not all of the same kind, nor do they fall under the same consideration in this question. Had men given themselves time to think coolly, and to make the true separation in this case, we had not perhaps been told that the difficulties of some parts of the Scripture are an objection to the revelation itself.

The books of the New Testament may be considered either as historical, as doctrinal, or as controversial, and some as a mixture of the two last. By the historical, I understand the narrative of our Saviour's life and death, and of the preaching of his Apostles after his resurrection and ascension. These, as they are merely historical, afford none of those difficulties which

are so much complained of: the story is plain and simple, and the different accounts of it, in the several gospels, vary no more from each other, than may naturally be expected from different pens.

By the doctrinal, I understand those matters of faith and rules of duty, which do not regard this or that particular case, but were intended for the use of the whole world, and are to continue to the end of it. And if there be a clear law, and clearly expressed, in the world, this is the law. Can words more clearly express the honor and worship we are to pay to God, or can more familiar directions be given in this case than are to be found in the gospel? Is not idolatry clearly condemned in the gospel? Is there any other thing relating to divine worship that we yet want instructing in? Are not the duties likewise, which we owe to each other, made evident and plain, and can there be any dispute about them, except what arises from lust, or avarice, or other self-interest? As to the peculiar benefits of the gospel, are they not declared without obscurity? Can you read the gospel, and doubt whether Christ died for you; whether God will grant pardon to the penitent, or his assistance to those who ask it; whether he will reward all such in glory, who continue the faithful disciples of his Son? What other revelation do we want, or can we desire, in these great and weighty concerns? Or what is there wanting to make up a complete system of religion? These things you read in the gospels, these things you read in the other writings of the Apostles; in these there is a perfect harmony and consent of all the inspired writers.

But still, you say, there are difficulties in Scripture. And so there are: but they are such as do not interfere with the clear revelation made by Christ. The controversial parts of Scripture, such I mean as combat the particular opinions and errors of the Jews or others, are in many places dark and hard to be understood: but had there never been any dispute with the Jews or others, had all obeyed without dispute, the gospel had been perfect; and is perfect still, however divines or others may differ in expounding the particulars incident to those debates. Had St. Paul said nothing of election or reprobation (and, as these terms are generally understood, nothing perhaps

he has said) our gospel had not been less complete; since these points, however understood, make no alteration in our duty, and they ought to make none in our faith. It was a proper part of the Apostles' office to root out the prejudices and errors which stood in the way of the gospel of Christ; and whilst they were disputing with Jew and Gentile, and proving that Jesus is the Christ, they were doing the work of their great Master. These writings, conveyed down to us, are of inestimable value, and worth our utmost pains and study to understand, being transcripts of that wisdom with which the Apostles were endowed. They contain the great doctrines and the great proofs of Christianity; in which points they are not only of the greatest authority, but have likewise the greatest clearness: the particular disputes which are intermixed refer often to principles and opinions, which we can hardly, at least not surely, discover; and when men apply things pointed to one single view by the Apostles, which view they have no clear sight of, to the general doctrines of Christianity, no wonder if they disturb the whole, and spread confusion over the clearest parts of the gospel.

To this conduct have been owing many of the disputes which have perplexed the world; and men have forgot the plain parts of Scripture, while, to the utter ruin of Christian charity, they have worried one another about the obscure ones. To give one instance of this: if there be any thing plain in any book in the world, this is plain in Scripture, 'That without holiness no man shall see God.' This is the foundation of all religion, the ground on which the revelation itself is built; and yet who is there that wants to be informed that doctrines destructive of this great article have been advanced on the authority of Scripture? Who has not heard that good works are not necessary to justification? and heard St. Paul quoted for a voucher? not where he is delivering the general doctrines of Christianity, but where he is beating down the particular mistakes of his countrymen. As to these parts of Scripture, happy is he who understands them, for he shall discover much of the wisdom and justice of God in his dealings with his ancient people, the people of the Jews: but he that understands them not has this comfort, that his salvation, his religion, depends not on any

controversy that concerned the Jews only, but on the plain declarations of God made to all mankind.

Thus much may serve to show how far the difficulties and obscurities which really are found in the holy Scripture, do affect the common cause of religion: and I think it is evident that our common religion stands clear even of these difficulties.

Other difficulties there are, which more properly belong to religious men than religion: such are the disputes and nice inquiries of the schools, which often enter into the debates of learned writers. But it is strange to find these urged as objections against the gospel by any sober-minded man. For what are these disputes to the gospel? God has promised his assistance to all who endeavor to serve him: is there any difficulty in understanding this? Let the schools consider the nature of grace, and how it influences the mind, and divide it into a hundred sorts, what is that to the gospel? or what is it to a man who is assured that God will assist him, and who knows that God cannot want means to make good his promise?

In like manner there are many doubts about the sacraments of the gospel, and how and what grace they confer: but dispute as you will, this one point is clear, 'He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.'

Suppose this, you will say, to be true, and that these doubts and difficulties do not affect the authority or truth of the gospel; yet they are so blended with the cause of religion, that they are not easily separated from it by unlearned and unskilful men: and this at least renders the gospel of little use, since it is a rule, the straightness of which cannot be discerned by the generality of mankind. And this brings me to my second head:

To consider these difficulties with respect to ourselves.

From what has been already said, it is evident that the Scriptures contain a plain and intelligible system of religion: and would men follow the directions of what they do and may understand, and not think themselves under direction of what they do not understand, there would be no great difficulty in this case. But the misfortune is, that men often fancy they understand what they do not, and raise rules and principles of religion to themselves out of places of which they are perfectly ignorant: and how can this be avoided? In the first place, it is

at every man's peril, if he makes any rule to himself, contrary to the plain express commands of God, which he does or may easily understand. In human laws, the main of the subject's duty is plain; and if he mistakes any dark passages, yet so as to keep strictly to his known duty, the consequence perhaps may be tolerable, and he excusable: but if a man from any dark statute should infer a right to rob and murder his neighbor, and act accordingly, (which acts of violence are plainly forbid in the law,) he ought to suffer, not for misunderstanding the obscure law, but for transgressing the plain one. The same reason holds as to the divine law: if a man takes care to observe what he does understand, his mistakes may not be dangerous; but if he forms to himself a liberty from the obscure places, inconsistent with the plain intelligible laws of the gospel, and acts accordingly; those plain laws, which should have been his rule, will be his condemnation.

But plain places are not equally plain to all capacities; and therefore even in this there may be a latitude; a latitude which we cannot determine, but which God, who is to be the judge, both can and will: and the great difficulty which men make to themselves in this case, seems to me to arise from a misapprehension of the judgment of God. Among men all are judged by the same rule, one law comprehends all, and is of the same interpretation and extent in all cases. That it is so, is the effect of human weakness; for in truth and equity, if we could come at them, no two cases are perhaps exactly alike, or equally subject to the same rule: but men cannot allow for the different capacities and circumstances of men, which they cannot judge of; and therefore all who are esteemed to have reason enough to govern themselves, are concluded under one law; and only children, idiots, and madmen are excepted cases. Though in truth the degrees by which men approach to madness or folly, could they be limited, which they cannot, would deserve a distinct consideration.

Now, if you conceive the judgment of God to be like the judgment of man, and that all shall be tried by one and the same rule; no wonder you ask, how ignorant men should come to the knowlege of their duty under the present doubts and difficulties which cloud religion.

But the truth is this; God, who gave all men one law, gave every man that share of reason which he enjoys: fools are capable of receiving no law; and no man is farther capable than in proportion to the degree of reason which God has given him: and consequently, in truth and equity, the law is no farther a law to him, than his reason is capable of receiving it. And since reason comes as much from God as the law itself; it is wrong to imagine that the true sense of the law is the only and the single rule by which God will judge: since it is evident in equity and justice, that the sentence on every man must arise from the complex consideration of the law that was before him, and the degree of reason which he had to apply it.

This great difficulty therefore, I beseech you, trust with God; and doubt not but that the righteous Judge of the world will do righteously.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XVI.

EPHESIANS, CHAP. II.—VERSE 18.

THE text rightly understood will give us a distinct conception of the Christian religion as distinguished from all others, natural, or pretending to revelation; inasmuch as the access unto God which this opens to us, is different from that exhibited by the others. All religions having the same end, viz. to please God, by serving him according to his will, for the sake of happiness here and hereafter, they differ in the means which they prescribe for this purpose. Two things to be regarded in the choice and appointment of these means; the holiness and majesty of God, and the nature and condition of man: reasons for this given. In all places where the gospel is unknown, or schemes are set up in opposition to the gospel, men split on one or other of these rocks: the gentile religion is inconsistent with God's holiness, as allowing of impure rites and vicious practices; injurious also to his majesty, as dividing the honor due to him among the creatures; natural religion again, founded on the purity and holiness of God's nature, prescribes a worship pure and holy, but prescribes it to men who have lost these qualities, and are unable to perform the rigorous conditions: thus it requires brick, as it were, without straw; and can afford no settled peace or satisfaction. Hence it appears how deplorable the condition of mankind must have been without the interposition of God by a new revelation; since every religion that could be framed would be deficient in one or other of these respects: this point enlarged on. The Christian religion alone

has effectually provided against both objections: this shown at some length.

Some observations drawn from the text, and what has been already said on it. First; these means of salvation which Christianity has provided, viz. the assistance of the Spirit, and the mediation of the Son, were necessary to the life of the world, the state and condition of man considered. Not meant that they were so absolutely necessary that an all-powerful and all-wise God could not save the world by any other method; but that the condition of man before the coming of Christ was such that he could not, by the help of reason and nature, so apply himself to God as to be secure of his pardon and mercy; but there was a necessity of providing other means; and those we have being made choice of by God, we may safely affirm that such were necessary for the salvation of the world. The truth of the proposition thus limited, plainly shows the reasonableness of the gospel, and God's wisdom in the revelation of it: for suppose the contrary to be true, that men were able of themselves to do God's will, engage his favor, and obtain salvation, and it will then be hard to account for the reasonableness of Christianity and God's wisdom, which provides preternatural assistances to serve ends which could be accomplished without them: but if we consider man in the state in which Scripture represents him, we shall see the want there was of the Mediator for our reconciliation with God, and the Holy Spirit for his influence in subduing our unruly passions. The economy of God in the gospel dispensation, closely shut up in the words of the text, explained: for a distinct conception of it, we must conceive the Spirit of God as always present with us; the Son as always in the presence of the Father; each exercising their respective offices: this will teach us what it is *to have access by the Spirit, through Christ:* this point enlarged on. But,

Secondly; these being the necessary means of salvation, it was likewise necessary to reveal to the world the doctrines con-

cerning the Son and the Holy Spirit: and the belief of them is necessary to every Christian, as far as the right use of the means depends on the right faith and belief of the doctrines. *Whosoever denieth the Son,* saith St. John, *hath not the Father:* for since we can only come to the Father through the Son, to deny the Son is to cut off all communication between us and the Father. The same may be said of the blessed Spirit, through whom we are in Christ: *if any man,* says St. Paul, *have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:* our Saviour himself has told us, *this is eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.*

When we were to be put under the conduct of the Spirit, and all our hopes rested on obedience to his holy motions, was it not necessary to inform us who this Spirit is? and that he is sufficient to the office allotted him, viz. to instruct us in the ways of God, and to rescue us from the powers of evil? Human reason may find it hard to conceive that this holy Spirit is the eternal Spirit of God, &c.; but it would be harder still to believe that the Spirit could do what is ascribed to him in Scripture, unless he were this glorious person: this point enlarged on: God therefore has dealt with us more like reasonable creatures, in declaring the dignity and power of the persons in whom we are to trust, than if he had required from us the same faith in them without such a declaration: and this shows how foolishly men sometimes charge God, when they complain of the heavy burthen laid on their faith and understanding by the gospel doctrines in this respect.

We see now what every Christian has to hope for from the assistance of the Spirit, and intercession of the Son: we were all strangers to God, and children of disobedience; but are now reconciled to him, and can approach him as our loving Father. Having this access, our all depends on the use we make of this great privilege. By having access to God, we are not placed in a state of security, but in one of probation: this idea enlarged on to the end.

DISCOURSE XVI.

EPHESIANS, CHAP. II.—VERSE 18.

For through him we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father.

THESE words, rightly understood, will give us a distinct conception of the nature of the Christian religion, as it stands distinguished from all others, whether natural, or pretending to revelation. All religions pretend to give access to God, by instructing men in what manner to approach him by prayer and supplication; how to please him and obtain his favor and protection, by such works as each religion accounts to be holy and acceptable to God; and how to reconcile ourselves to him, after having offended him by our transgressions, through sorrow and repentance, or such other means as have been devised and instituted as effectual to this end. But the access to God, which the gospel opens to us, is to be had only under the guidance and direction of God's holy Spirit, and in the name and through the mediation of God's own Son. This access is the only one which the Christian religion knows any thing of; for we cannot come to God but by his holy Spirit, and through his Son: and this is what no other religion does or can pretend to.

The end of all religion is manifestly this, to please God by serving him according to his will, in order to obtain of him happiness in this world and in the next: for the belief that God is the Governor of the world, and the Giver of every good thing, is the foundation of all the religious worship and honor which are paid to him. All religions being thus far the same, they differ when they come to prescribe the method, and to appoint the proper means by which God is to be served and applied to.

Two things there are, which must necessarily be regarded in

the choice and appointment of these means; the holiness and majesty of God, and the nature and condition of man: for unless the means prescribed are such as are suitable to the holiness and majesty of God, he can never be pleased by them; for whatever is contrary to his holiness, or injurious to his majesty, must ever be an abomination to him. On the other hand, the means of religion must likewise be adapted to the use of man, must be such as he can practise, and such as, his present condition considered, will enable him to serve God acceptably; for without this, how proper soever the means may be in themselves, yet they can be of no use or service to him.

If we examine all the schemes of religion which either prevail in those parts of the world where the gospel is unknown, or which are set up in opposition to the gospel where it is known, we shall find that they split on one or other of these rocks. The Gentile religion is inconsistent with the holiness of God, as mixing impure rites and ceremonies with its worship, and allowing the practice of such vices as even nature abhors: it is injurious likewise to his majesty, as dividing the honor which is due to him alone among the creatures; teaching men to pay religious worship to those who by nature are not gods. On the other side, natural religion, which seems to be the most growing scheme, and is set up in opposition to the gospel, taking its rise from the purity and holiness of God's nature, and the essential difference of good and evil, prescribes a worship pure and holy; but it prescribes it to men who have lost their purity and holiness, and are no longer able to perform the rigorous conditions: it requires brick without allowing straw; exacting of men, in their present degenerate state, the purity and holiness of uncorrupted reason and nature: it affords no strength or assistance to men to secure against sin; and when they have sinned, it cannot give them any certain assurance of pardon and forgiveness: so that men, not being able to perform its conditions, and having no security of the mercy of God without performing them, can have no settled peace or satisfaction in it.

From these two considerations plainly appears the deplorable condition of mankind without the interposition of God by a new revelation of himself to the world: for after the utmost

efforts that you can make to frame a religion in all respects proper, you will still find that it will be defective in one or other of these respects. If you require such degrees of holiness from men, as may render their service acceptable to the holy God, you will require what they cannot perform, and thereby preclude them of any access to him; or, if you consult the present powers of men, and require no more righteousness than they by their strength can arrive at; if you indulge the passions which you cannot correct, if you allow the vices you cannot reform, if you tolerate the infirmities which you cannot remove: by thus adapting religion to the condition of men, you will render it too impure to be accepted by God, who 'is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity;' and the communication between heaven and earth will still be shut up against all such who 'hold the truth in unrighteousness.'

The Christian religion alone has effectually provided against both these cases: it requires a worship spiritual, pure, and holy; its laws are just and righteous, but abate nothing of the strictest rules of reason and morality; it exacts from us not only an outward obedience and conformity in our actions, but it searcheth the very heart and reins, and requireth 'truth in the inward parts;' it restrains every dissolute thought of our minds, and every inordinate desire of our hearts. On the other side, that the gracious purposes of God may not be defeated by the weakness and infirmity of men, it has provided proper remedies for every want: it has brought down from heaven the pardon of God to all the sins of men, which was sealed with the blood of its great author, the ever-blessed Son of God: it has reconciled us to our offended Father, and conferred on us anew the spirit of adoption: it has put us under the direction of the Holy Spirit, who is our fellow-laborer in the work of God, and who so effectually helpeth our infirmities, that 'when we are weak, then are we strong;' who is our stay in prosperity, and our support in adversity, and the undivided companion of our spiritual warfare, leading us through Christ to God, who is the end of all our hopes. And as it has thus strenghtened and enabled us to draw near to God, so has it likewise as effectually secured our access to him through Christ, who 'sitteth at the right hand of God, to make continual intercession for us;' to offer up, and by himself to per-

fect, all our prayers and praises before the throne of God; to supply all our wants, to confirm our faith, to strengthen our virtue, and to make our repentance available to the remission of our sins; and at the last, if we perform the conditions on our part, to receive us into the kingdom of his Father for ever.

The use I would make of the text, and of what has been already discoursed on it, is to observe to you:

First, that these means of salvation, which the Christian religion has provided, were necessary to the life of the world, the state and condition of man considered.

Secondly, that these means being necessary, it was likewise necessary to reveal to mankind the doctrine concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit; and that the belief of these doctrines is necessary to every Christian, as far as the right use of the means depends on the right faith and belief of the doctrines: for as the Apostle to the Hebrews tells us, that whoever 'comes to God must believe that he is;' so likewise whoever comes to God through Christ, in the Spirit, must believe that the Spirit is the Spirit of God and of Christ, and able to direct him: that Christ is the Son of God, and able to bring him to his Father. And by this means shall we be able to justify to ourselves the wisdom and goodness of God in revealing this wonderful knowlege to men, inasmuch as he did it, not to impose arbitrarily on their faith and their understanding, but in order to perfect and render effectual their salvation.

First, I would observe to you that these means of salvation which the Christian religion has provided, namely, the assistance of the Spirit, and the mediation of the Son, were necessary to the life of the world, the state and condition of man considered.

I would not here be understood to affirm that these means were so absolutely necessary in themselves, that God could not by any other method save the world. The wisdom and the ways of God are infinite and unsearchable: we cannot, and therefore ought not, to pretend to set bounds to them. To inquire in what other way God might possibly have saved mankind, will make us neither wiser in this world nor happier in the next.

What I would then be understood to mean is this; that the

condition of man before the coming of Christ was such, that he could not by the help of reason and nature so apply himself to God, as to be secure of his pardon and mercy; but there was a necessity of providing other means besides those of reason and nature, which no one could provide but God alone: that he has provided us with the assistance of his Holy Spirit, and appointed his own Son for our Redeemer and Mediator. Some means being therefore absolutely necessary to be provided, and these being the means made choice of by God; we may safely affirm, without prying too far into the hidden mysteries of God, that these means were necessary to the salvation of the world.

The truth of this proposition thus limited, is that which does most plainly show us the reasonableness of the gospel, and the wisdom and goodness of God in the revelation of it: for suppose the contrary to this to be true, that men were able of themselves to do the whole will of God, and so to apply to him as to engage his favor and mercy, and to obtain salvation for themselves at his hands; and you will find it very hard to account for the reasonableness of the Christian religion, which provides preternatural assistances to enable us to do that which nature can do without them; or for the wisdom of God, in making the revelation to serve those ends which men knew how to accomplish without it. But if you consider man in the state under which the Scripture represents him before the coming of Christ, lost to God and to himself, the slave of passion and the servant of sin, equally unable to govern himself, and to serve his Maker; you will then see the want there was of a Mediator to be the ambassador of our peace and to reconcile us to God; you will then see the want there was of the Holy Spirit's influence to enable us to subdue those unruly passions and appetites, which were a partition-wall between us and our God; that we might serve our Maker in spirit and in truth, and 'perfect holiness in the fear of God.'

Give me leave to stay here a little to represent to you the economy of God in the gospel dispensation, which the Apostle in the text has shut up in few words; 'We have access to God, through Christ, by the Spirit.' To give you a distinct conception of this, and of the different offices of the Son and

of the Spirit, you must conceive the Spirit of God as always present with us; the Son as always in the presence of the Father. The Spirit dwells with the faithful, to guide and to direct them, to second and encourage all their good desires, to help them in overcoming their infirmities; in a word, to labor together with them in the work of their salvation, to make their calling and election sure. The Son of God is at the right hand of the Majesty on high; there he is our advocate; he intercedes for us; he receives and offers up our prayers; he obtains for us the remission of our sins in virtue of the one oblation which he once made of himself on the cross, the memorial of which is ever in the sight of God. This will teach us what it is to 'have access by the Spirit through Christ.' For the Spirit abideth with us; he is at our right hand; and by his happy influence it is that we draw near to Christ, and by him approach to the Father. The Son is our High-priest, clothed with majesty and power, and seated at the right hand of God, able to save all who will come to him; through whose powerful and always prevailing mediation and intercession the way is opened to pardon and reconciliation. The Spirit is our comforter, given us to dwell and to abide with us, to be a principle of new life within us, to quicken our mortal bodies, that, dying to sin, we may live unto God through holiness. To draw men to God is the work of the Spirit, who therefore resides and dwells with men: to reconcile God to man is the work of our High-priest, who lives in the glory of God, making continual intercession for us.

And now consider the calamitous condition of mankind under what view you please, you will always find a proper remedy provided by the mercy of God. If you reflect on the holiness of God, and his hatred of sin and iniquity, and begin to fear that he can never be reconciled to sinners; take courage, the work is difficult, but the Son of God has undertaken it; and how great soever the distance between God and you is, yet through the Son you may have access unto him. If still you fear for yourself, that all may again be lost through your own weakness and inability to do good; even here help is at hand, the Spirit of God is your support, he is the pledge and earnest of your redemption. But,

Secondly, these being the necessary means of salvation, it was likewise necessary to reveal to the world the doctrines concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit: and the belief of these doctrines is necessary to every Christian, as far as the right use of the means depends on the right faith and belief of the doctrines.

'He that hath the Son,' says St. John, 'hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God, hath not life:' and again, 'whosoever denieth the Son, hath not the Father.' For since we can only come to the Father through the Son, to deny the Son is to cut off all communication between us and the Father. The same may be said of the blessed Spirit, through whom we are in Christ: 'If any man,' says St. Paul, 'have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:' our blessed Lord has himself told us, 'That this is eternal life, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.'

When we were to be put under the conduct of the Spirit, and all our hopes depended on our obedience to and compliance with his holy motions; was it not necessary to inform us who this Spirit is? to let us know that he is sufficient to the office allotted him; that knowing perfectly the mind of God, even as the spirit of a man knoweth the things of a man, he is able fully to instruct us and to direct us in the ways of God; that being infinite and unconfined in time or place, he is equal to the extensive charge committed to his care, and can be ready at all times and in all places to succor the faithful servants of God; that being the Spirit of power and of might, he is able to rescue us out of all dangers, and protect us against all the powers and principalities of the kingdom of darkness? It may be hard perhaps to human reason to conceive that this holy Spirit is the eternal Spirit of God, and so intimately united with God, as to know the mind of God as perfectly as the spirit of a man which is in him knoweth the mind of man; but it would be harder still to believe that the Spirit could do what is ascribed to him in Scripture, without believing him to be this great and glorious person. It is a more rational act of faith, to expect from the eternal Spirit of God the sanctification of our souls and bodies, spiritual aid and assistance in all our trials and temptations, and whatever else is necessary to our salva-

tion; than it would be to expect the same things from any other spirit, of whose power and attributes we knew nothing. The power and mightiness of the Spirit, made known to us by God, is a reasonable, a just foundation for the hope and confidence we have in him; but were we ignorant of his power, our trust in him would be without ground; and we should lose this boasting, which is now the glory of our faith, that 'we know in whom we have believed.' Since therefore, by the determinate counsel of God, the redemption of the world was to be the work of his Son: and the sanctification of it the work of his Spirit; he has dealt with us more like reasonable creatures, in declaring to us the dignity and power of the persons in whom we are to trust, than he would have done, had he required of us the same faith and reliance on those persons, without declaring to us how able and powerful they are to help us. If therefore it be reasonable for God to save the world, by redeeming it by his Son, by sanctifying it by his Holy Spirit, it cannot be unreasonable for him to make known his Son and his Spirit to the world, that all men everywhere may by the one Spirit of God, and through the only Son of God, approach to the Father. And this shows how foolishly men charge God, when they complain of the heavy imposition laid on their faith and their understanding by the gospel doctrines concerning the Son and the Holy Spirit. God has revealed this for our sakes only, not for matter of speculation, or for the enlarging of our knowlege; but that, having a reasonable ground of assurance and hope in him, we may, through faith and patient abiding, inherit the promises.

You see now what every Christian has to expect and hope for from the assistance of the Spirit, and intercession of the Son of God. We all were strangers to God, and children of disobedience; we are now reconciled to God, and can approach him as our loving Father. Having thus access to the Father, our all depends on the use we make of this great privilege. By having access to God we are not placed in a state of security, but in a state of probation; we are received as prodigal sons come home; if we continue obedient, we may hope for the inheritance; but if we turn prodigals again, our case will be desperate. This is the condition of Christians. The

Scripture has told us what our present state is; but as to our future state, that depends on our obeying, or not obeying, the commands of God. And those who look for farther security, and expect to be ascertained what their future state will be, do very much impose on themselves, and ascribe to the Holy Spirit an office of which the Scripture knows nothing. God has done and will do great things for you; let not this make you vain and presumptuous, but let it excite your care, that the gift of God may not be bestowed on you in vain; and always bear in mind the Apostle's advice, 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do.' Some imagine that God's working with us is a reason why we should be confident and secure of our salvation: but you see St. Paul was of another mind. He writes to those who certainly had the Spirit; for he tells them that God did work in them both to will and to do: but does he tell them that they were safe and secure and out of all danger? No, he says nothing like it; on the contrary, he calls on them to fear and tremble, lest, having received so great a gift, they should by their negligence, as thinking themselves secure, forfeit all the hopes of the gospel.

God says, with respect to the old world, 'My spirit shall not always strive with man:' the case is the same under the gospel. The Spirit of God works with us, but will not always strive with us; and therefore, whilst we may have the help of God's Spirit, we must lay hold of the opportunity and work with him. And whoever considers this, will find he has great reason to tremble and fear; for if he loses the opportunity of making the best use of the assistance of the Spirit when it is offered, he may lose the Spirit and himself for ever. Let us therefore work whilst we have the light, and continually pray in the words of our church, 'O Lord, take not thy Holy Spirit from us.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XVII.

EPHESIANS, CHAP. II.—VERSE. 8.

INTRODUCTION: showing what is taught in the compass of the text: in discoursing on the proposition, that faith is the gift of God, it is shown, first, what the Scripture doctrine on this head is; secondly, some considerations proper to the subject are suggested.—I. The faith spoken of in the text is such a faith as is necessary to salvation: various significations of the word *faith* in Scripture laid down; shown not to be that faith of which the Apostle speaks: how far the natural gifts of sense and reason can carry us, explained: the result is barely the assent or dissent of the mind to the things under inquiry. With regard even to these first rudiments of faith, our will and inclination are necessary for the exercise of that reason and knowlege which may lead us to them: our will and inclination shown to be generally averse to this inquiry: example drawn from men's conduct at the first preaching of the gospel: to enable us fairly to examine the truth of a divine revelation, a right disposition of mind is required, according to our Saviour's own words John vii., 17.: this disposition is not natural to man: to prepare his mind therefore for the reception of gospel truth, is the work of the Spirit; this shown by many examples to be the language of Scripture. Faith also shown to signify trust and reliance on God, and on his promises made by his Son: *saving* faith described as an active principle, influencing the mind to obedience to the law of God: this the faith to which we owe our growth in Christian graces and virtues: this the faith spoken of by St. Paul. Faith shown to be made up of the concurrence of the will and understanding; the latter

of which is the rule to judge truth by; but the former not the right rule of action without the aid of the Holy Spirit: this shown from Scripture.—II. Considerations on the subject suggested. It is shown that our ascribing faith to the operation of the Spirit, does not make it cease to be a reasonable act of the mind; and that the gift of the Spirit leaves a man free to examine the proofs of religion, influencing his mind neither one way nor the other in judging of the truth. Faith is not perfected but through obedience: it is one thing to *judge* with reason, and another to *act* with reason: the spirit is given to us that we may not only think, but act, like reasonable creatures. If God had ever promised to force and subdue our reason to a belief of the gospel, he might have spared the signs, and wonders, and miracles which accompanied it. The method by which we arrive at the knowlege of spiritual truths shown from the second chapter of St. Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians. Second consideration: the Scripture is not express regarding the measure in which the Spirit is given: yet all to whom it is given do not obey it; whence it is evident that all who are lost are not lost for want of God's aid. He has engaged to give us all things necessary to salvation: as far therefore as the Spirit is necessary, we are sure of it: as men improve in holiness, they contract a greater familiarity with the Spirit: the inference from this is, that we should endeavor to *work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for God worketh in us*, &c.; and if we cease, he will withdraw his grace. Conclusion: signs and marks of divine grace in the regenerate are obedience to the will of God and good works.

DISCOURSE XVII.

EPHESIANS, CHAP. II.—VERSE 8.

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

We have here in few words the argument which St. Paul always insists on, when he has occasion to set forth the kindness of God towards mankind. Life and immortality are the greatest blessings that we have any notion of; and these were brought to light by the gospel of Christ: him God gave for a Redeemer to the world, 'that whosoever believeth on him should not die, but have eternal life.' And even that through faith in him we are saved, is the gift of God; for of ourselves we are able to do nothing. These things are taught us in the compass of the text, 'We are saved by grace:' we had no title or claim to salvation, but God of his own good will hath sent among us plenteous redemption; and according to the richness of his mercy, and the great love wherewith he loved us, hath together with Christ quickened us who were dead in sins. The condition of this salvation on our part is faith; for we are saved by 'grace through faith.' We must believe our Redeemer, that he cometh from God, and hath the words of life; and must rely on him to perform the word of salvation which is gone out of his mouth. But neither on the performance of this condition can we say that our own arm hath saved us, or that we have done any thing towards perfecting our redemption: for this salvation through faith, and this faith, is 'not of ourselves, it is the gift of God.'

I shall discourse on this proposition, that faith is the gift of God: First, I shall endeavour to show what the Scripture

doctrine on this head is; and, secondly, shall suggest to you some considerations proper to this subject.

First then, let us consider what the Scripture doctrine on this head is. The faith which St. Paul speaks of in the text is such a faith as is effectual to salvation; for it is the faith through which, by grace, we are saved: this faith he asserts to be the gift of God. There are different significations of the word 'faith' in Scripture: sometimes it signifies barely an assent of the mind to the revelations and doctrines of the gospel, grounded on such evidence as the things were capable of. This faith sometimes is merely the effect of common sense; for men cannot help believing the things they see. Sometimes this faith is grounded on the necessary deductions of reason from common principles; by this means we arrive at the knowlege of God: a man of reason can no more avoid believing the existence of a first cause, than a man with eyes can avoid thinking that there is a material world in which he lives. But neither has this assent of the mind the true nature of faith in it: 'Thou believest,' saith St. James, 'that there is one God; thou doest well; the devils also believe, and tremble.' But neither of these kinds of faith being the faith through which we are saved, you cannot say that St. Paul asserts of these that they are the gift of God; any farther than as sense and reason are his gifts, by which we know these and all other things. Nor do we teach that nature and reason cannot lead to the speculative knowlege of divine truths; for the evidence of all divine truth resolves itself ultimately into either sense or reason; which are the common gifts of God to mankind, by the principles of which the truth of all things, depending on the deductions of sense and reason, may be proved and examined. From the exercise of reason we come to know God, and the essential difference between good and evil; and by these principles are enabled to judge of any doctrine, whether it be agreeable to the pure and holy nature of God; which is the first presumptive argument for the truth of any divine revelation; that it is holy and pure, and such a one as, were God to have given a law to the world, he would have given: from reason we learn the unlimited power of God; and from sense and reason we know the limited power of man, and are enabled to distinguish

between the works which the power or policy of man can perform, and the works which can flow only from the unbounded power of God: from hence we can judge of the positive arguments of a divine revelation, the works and miracles which are offered to the world in confirmation of its truth. Thus far the natural gifts of sense and reason can carry us; but the result is barely the assent or dissent of the mind to the things under inquiry: which assent alone is not the faith through which we are saved.

But let it be observed, as to these first rudiments of faith, that though reason and knowlege may attain to them, yet the exercise of reason and knowlege depends on the will and inclination; which are not naturally much given to dwell on the subject of religion, but are engaged in the affairs and concerns of the world, and taken up in the pursuit of present pleasures and enjoyments: that, were men left to themselves, but few would arrive even to this degree of faith; not for want of understanding to discern, but for want of will to inquire after the things which make for their salvation. Thus, at the first preaching of the gospel, all the worldly-minded men, and generally all the great men, were professed enemies to our Saviour. No sooner did he appear to preach a new doctrine, but they opposed him: not that they had time or opportunity to examine his pretensions; but this presumption, that his doctrine would thwart their interest, and lesson their power and authority among the people, prevailed with them to endeavor to stifle and suppress this new doctrine before it spread to their prejudice: in which they were evidently guided, not by sense or reason, but by a perverse will and evil disposition. And since men cannot but know, from their natural notions of good and evil, that any revelation coming from a pure and holy God must cross their evil designs and affections, they cannot but lie under a great indisposition to inquire after divine truths, in which, as long as lust and passion have the dominion over them, they can promise themselves but little comfort or satisfaction: so that, to enable men fairly to examine the truth of a divine revelation, and to acknowlege it on full and sufficient evidence, there must be such a disposition of mind to receive whatever may appear to be the will of God, as may enable you to be

impartial judges. This our Saviour requires of us, when he says, 'If any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the docrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself;' that is, if any man has so far got the victory over his own passions and lusts, as to be ready to give himself to the direction of God's will, whenever it may be made appear to him; this man is in a right disposition to receive the truths of the gospel, and to judge whether Christ be indeed the Prophet of the Most High. Now this disposition is far from being natural to man, according to the nature man has at present; and therefore thus to prepare and dispose men's minds to receive the gospel, is the work of the Spirit, and is ascribed to him constantly in Scripture, where there is occasion to speak of it: 'No man,' says our Lord, 'can come unto me, except the Father which hath sent me, draw him.' And again, 'No man can come unto me except it were given unto him of my Father;' that is, unless the Father, by the grace of his Spirit, inclines and disposes his will to attend to the words of life which I deliver. To the same purpose he speaks in another place, 'He that is of God, heareth God's word;' where, to be of God is no more than to be of the number of those who are disposed to obey God; for if to be of God signifies any thing more, it will hardly leave any tolerable sense for the word. Our Saviour would not say, 'Those who obey God will hear God's word;' which is saying, 'Those who obey God, will obey God:' and, therefore, to be of God must signify no more than to be ready and disposed to receive the will of God by the influence of his grace. To be of God, and to be drawn of God, and to be willing to do the will of God, are manifestly put to signify the same thing, because the same thing is affirmed of them. Our Saviour says, 'No man can come unto him, unless he be drawn of God;' and yet he says, 'He that is of God will hear his word;' and in another place, 'If any man is willing to do the will of God, he shall know of his doctrine;' and if so, then to be willing to do the will of God must amount to the same thing with being of God, and being drawn by God. From whence it follows that those who are willing to do his will, that is, disposed to receive his truth, are drawn by him; that is, all who are well disposed to receive the faith of Christ, owe

their disposition to the grace and influence of God's holy Spirit. Accordingly we read of Lydia, that 'God opened her heart to attend unto the things which were spoken of Paul;' where opening her heart can signify nothing but inclining her will to attend to and examine the truths of the gospel, which were the things spoken by Paul. And as faith is ascribed to this disposition wrought by the Spirit of God, so the want of faith is ascribed to the contrary disposition, where a man is under the power of lust and appetite, and possessed with the love of this world and the pleasures of it: 'If our gospel be hid,' says St. Paul, 'it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.'

But, Secondly, faith signifies likewise trust and reliance on God, and includes a confident hope and expectation that God will perform his promises made to us in his Son. It is described as an active principle of religion, influencing the mind to obedience to the law of God. This is the faith through which 'we are saved,' and is affirmed by St. Paul to be 'the gift of God:' to this faith we owe our growth and progress in all kinds of Christian graces and virtues; this is the foundation of them, and this it is that makes them acceptable to God, that they are done in faith. That faith is perfect which is attended with a good conscience, 'void of offence towards God and towards man.' These two St. Paul couples together in his advice to Timothy, enjoining him 'to hold the faith and a good conscience, which some having put away, concerning faith have made shipwreck:' so that faith cannot stand without a good conscience; that is, it is no faith which does not 'purge the conscience from dead works,' and 'perfect holiness in the fear of God.' Now all that reason can do, is to assent or dissent to any doctrine; but obedience must come from the will. Wicked men often believe; but, like the devils, they tremble at the majesty of God, and do not love or delight in him, or seek to do his will. Faith then is made up of the concurrence of the will and the understanding. The understanding is still the rule to judge truth by; but the will is not the right rule of action, and therefore the assistance of the Spirit, to induce the will to follow the understanding, is

necessary in the perfect work of faith: and this work is ascribed to the Spirit in Scripture. Our Saviour, speaking to his disciples, tells them, 'I am the vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.' Christ abideth in his members by his Holy Spirit; and therefore we are told, 'that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost.' So then our Saviour's doctrine is, that without the assistance of his Spirit we can do nothing, but with it we may bring forth fruit. To bring forth fruit, in the phrase of Scripture, is to be obedient to the laws of God, and to be employed in the works of righteousness: so that faith cannot be perfected, or become the governing principle of our lives, without the assistance of the Spirit, to subdue our wills to the law of holiness. Faith in this sense is reckoned among the fruits of the Spirit, both in the Epistle to the Galatians and in that to the Corinthians: 'The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith.' So, in the Epistle to the Philippians, the Apostle tells them, 'It is given unto them in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake:' where the Apostle's doctrine is manifestly this; that both to believe in Christ, and to suffer for Christ, are the gifts of God through his Holy Spirit. I shall not multiply quotations on this head, which lie ready to any diligent inquirer's search; but shall spend the time that remains in suggesting to you some proper observations on this subject.

And, first, our ascribing faith to the operation of the Spirit does not make our faith cease to be a reasonable act of the mind; and yet this surmise is apt to affect men; and they think it is for want of reason to prove our religion that we require the gift of faith to make it go down. But the case is far otherwise: the Apostle advises us, 'always to be ready to give to every one that asketh it of us, a reason of the faith that is in us;' consequently, reason and faith, or reason and the gift of the Spirit, are consistent; or else it would not be possible for those who receive faith by the Spirit, to give a reason of the faith that is in them. Besides, a revelation sufficiently attested, that is, sufficiently proved to reason, is presupposed to the work of faith; for the gift of faith administers no new arguments for re-

ligion; and therefore, if it be not a reasonable religion before we have faith, it cannot be so afterwards. The first work of faith on the minds of men, as I proved by comparison of several parts of Scripture, is to dispose them to listen after and obey the will of God. Lydia's heart was opened by grace; this did not make her, right or wrong, take up with the Apostle's doctrine, but it is said that 'she attended to the words that were spoken by Paul.' Now the more you attend to a thing that has no reason in it, the less you will like it: let the Spirit therefore supply the grace of attention in the greatest measure; if there wants reason or evidence in the things we attend to, attention will serve no other purpose than to show us these defects: so that this gift of the Spirit neither influences the reason of man nor the reason of the thing; consequently, this gift of the Spirit is no ways inconsistent with reason. So neither is that other gift of the Spirit, by which we are disposed to a readiness to obey the will of God; for my being ready to obey the will of God cannot make a doctrine to be the will of God, which is not the will of God; or make me see arguments to prove a doctrine where there are none; consequently, let a man be ever so ready to obey the will of God, it cannot affect his judgment in discerning what is the will of God, or disturb the exercise of reason in searching for the doctrine which does contain the will of God. And therefore this gift of the Spirit likewise leaves a man free to examine the proofs of religion, and does not influence his mind one way or other in judging the truth: for a man who is willing to do the will of God must necessarily be very unwilling to do what is not his will; and therefore will be very loth to take up with any doctrine for the will of God, which is not sufficiently proved to be so. This grace therefore only puts him on searching and examining the pretences of religion, on the exercise of reason, to discern where truth lies: and this, I suppose, will be allowed to be the most reasonable thing a man can do. Thus, you see, the assent of the mind to the truth of religion is an act of reason, and must be so notwithstanding the gifts and assistances of the Spirit. And as reason is not disturbed by the gifts of the Spirit, which are previous to the assent of the mind; so I hope it will not be thought it can be influenced by those that are consequent to it. Faith is not

perfected but through obedience. The power to obey and to love God we ascribe to the Spirit. Now you cannot obey God, till you know what is the will of God; therefore you must first judge of religion before this gift can operate: and therefore this gift cannot affect your reason one way or other. After you have proved and consented to the truth of the gospel, it is highly reasonable you should obey it. But though reason, on due application, can discern the truth, yet it cannot govern the corrupt will; and therefore it is one thing to judge with reason, another thing to act with reason: and the grace of obedience is given us by the Spirit, that we may not only think but act like reasonable creatures.

I do not remember that God ever promised to force or subdue our reason to the belief of the gospel by his Spirit: if he had taken this method, he might have saved the trouble of working signs and wonders and miracles, and all other arguments might have been spared, which are only appeals to reason, and would have been needless, had the Spirit been given to particular persons for the conviction of their minds. The Apostle often prays, in behalf of his converts, 'that God would enlighten their minds and understandings; that he would increase their knowlege; that he would give them a right judgment in all things.' But I think it will be agreed that the more enlightened a man's mind is, the larger the compass of knowlege and understanding, and the better his judgment is, the more acute he will be in distinguishing truth from falsehood; consequently, the better able to judge of religion, and the less ready to receive it without sufficient evidence, that is, without reason.

In the second chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul treats of the method by which we arrive to the knowlege of spiritual truths: 'They are,' he says, 'spiritually discerned, and the natural man cannot receive them, they are foolishness to him;' and on this authority even the use of reason has been rejected in inquiries of religion, and men sent to the Spirit for proof. But what the Apostle says here will be found consistent with what has been already said on this head. In the third verse he tells the Corinthians, that 'his preaching was not with the enticing words of man's wisdom, but in the

demonstration of the Spirit and of power;' that is, he did not preach from natural topics, but preached the things which the Spirit had revealed to him; and gave the works of the Spirit, that is, signs and miracles, for proof of his doctrine. But this was a reasonable proof still, and such a one as reason could judge of. Verse the fourteenth, he says, 'The natural man cannot receive the things of the Spirit of God:' which is very true; for how should natural reason furnish arguments to prove the revelations of God, which have no connexion with natural principles of reason? But then he adds, 'These things are spiritually discerned;' or, as he words it in the eighteenth verse, 'they are discerned by comparing spiritual things with spiritual;' that is, by comparing the proofs of the Spirit and the revelations of the Spirit together. This comparison is the work of reason; for reason discerns the agreement between these spiritual things, and by considering the works and wonders of the Spirit, submits to the revelations of the Spirit. So what the Apostle affirms here is only this, that the revelations of God are not to be examined or known by principles or proofs of natural reason, but must be manifested by the proofs of the Spirit; for we have no proofs from reason for the revelations of the gospel, but we have the works of the Spirit, by which they are attested. And here it is plain what the work of the Spirit is: it brings proofs to the reason of man, but does not bring the reason of man to the proofs: so that reason and faith, or reason and the gift of the Spirit, are consistent.

Secondly, as to the measure in which the Spirit is given, the Scripture is not express: this we are sure of, that all to whom the Spirit is given do not obey the Spirit; for we read of some who 'resist the Spirit of God,' who 'do despite to the Holy Spirit:' from whence it is evident that all who are lost are not lost for want of due assistance from God; since they had the offer of the Spirit, but refused and withstood his holy motions. God has engaged in Christ to give us all things necessary to our salvation; and therefore, as far as the Spirit is necessary, so far we are sure of his assistance. As men improve in virtue and holiness, they contract a greater familiarity with the Holy Spirit; with such he is said 'to dwell, to abide with them;' which answers to what our Saviour says, 'To him that

hath, it shall be given: and from him that hath not, even that which he hath shall be taken away.' The plain consequence of which is, that we should, according to the Apostle's advice, 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling; for God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' If therefore we cease to work whilst we have time and opportunity, God will withdraw his grace from us; 'even that which we have shall be taken from us.' We cannot work without God: therefore should we work with fear and trembling, lest, if we neglect the appointed time, we should be left destitute of help, without hope or remedy.

Lastly, we may collect what are the signs and marks of grace in the regenerate; even this, that we keep the will of God. I before observed that to be drawn of God, and to be willing to do his will, are one and the same thing: if so, then all who do the will of God are drawn of God; and all who are effectually drawn of God do his will. From whence it follows that all who live virtuously and holily have the Spirit of God, and all who do wickedly are of their father the devil. From whence it follows that it is a vain and ill-grounded confidence that some men have in their spiritual attainments, whilst they work the works of darkness: for he only that doth the works of the Spirit hath the Spirit of God; 'and hereby do we know that we love him, if we keep his commandments.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XVIII.

PHILIPPIANS, CHAP. II.—VERSES 12, 13.

INTRODUCTION: statement of the unhappy disputes in the Christian church relating to the natural powers of man to work out his own salvation, and those relating to the grace and assistance promised in the gospel. Inconsistent as these things may seem to be, St. Paul has thought fit to join them together: his doctrine considered, and the natural consequences which a Christian should draw from it. The text consists of two parts—an exhortation, and an argument to enforce it: the argument at first sight may appear to be false, as leading to confidence and assurance rather than to fear and trembling. This explained by the different significations of the word *fear:* there is a fear of our enemies, and also a fear of losing the love and good offices of our friends; which latter fear excites us to conform ourselves to their inclinations. That this is the fear of which the Apostle speaks, shown from the beginning of the chapter, where he so strongly presses humility on his converts; and also from the two verses following the text, *do all things without murmurings and repinings, that ye may be blameless and harmless,* &c. The Christian law indeed is fortified with rewards and punishments, as motives of obedience: it is shown however that the fear arising from them is not meant: the exhortation in the text belongs to all men, even the most perfect Christians: it is different therefore from the fear which belongs to criminals and slaves, and which *perfect love casteth out.* The reason why we ought to fear, viz. because *God worketh in us both to will and to do,* examined. Totally dependent as we are on God, this fear

has more of care and solicitude in it, than of terror and amazement: the text shown to be parallel to that passage in St. Peter, *Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.* Farther, this fear shown to arise from a proper sense of our own insufficiency and dependence on God; according to the Apostle's expression, *let him that standeth take heed lest he fall:* this shown to be a just and holy fear, not injurious to the love of God towards us, nor to our faith and hope in him. From this account of holy fear, the meaning of the expression, *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,* will easily appear to consist in care and diligence to set ourselves to perform the will and commands of God. It is shown that there is something in the language used to explain the doctrine of grace, liable to be abused by ignorant or crafty men; this language tried in a common case, to guard men against being misled by mere sounds. Consequences of the doctrine and exhortation in the text considered.—I. It appears that the Christian state is not a state of security; for if so, the Apostle's exhortation would have no meaning: the Philippians themselves had received grace, and if grace once received cannot be lost, what had they to fear? That we fear, is no argument of mistrusting God; our fear regards ourselves; and our best security is this fear.—II. From the Apostle's command, *work out your salvation,* we see how necessary good works are. The good works of Christians do not deserve all the hard words that have been bestowed on them, if the words, *he worketh in us,* &c., be duly considered; for they are the fruits of his Spirit. Conclusion: the manner in which God works for the faithful explained. By the argument drawn from it for fear and diligence, it is evident that he does not work irresistibly: he enables us to work; our danger therefore is from ourselves, and we alone can defeat our own hopes.

DISCOURSE XVIII.

PHILIPPIANS, CHAP. II.—VERSES 12, 13.

Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

THERE have not perhaps been any more unhappy disputes in the Christian church than those relating to the natural powers of man to work out his own salvation, and those relating to the nature and measure of the grace and assistance promised in the gospel of Christ. On one side it is insisted that virtue and vice owe their being to the freedom and choice of the agent, and lose their name when they are the effect of force and constraint; and, consequently, that to suppose men to be made righteous by any influence from any other being than themselves, is contrary to reason. And hence it is that some of the advocates for mere human reason, as sufficient to all the purposes of salvation, despise the promises made in the gospel, of grace and spiritual assistance; and others of them so explain them as to leave them no meaning at all. On the other side, some zealous asserters of the doctrine of grace, in order to magnify this free gift of God, allow nothing to reason or the natural powers of men; but think it the highest presumption and the greatest affront offered to the grace of God, to suppose that men can do any thing for themselves. It is, in their own way of expression, to make the power of God attendant on the weakness of man, and to make the grace of God the servant and handmaid of human reason. And thus it is agreed on both sides, by those who carry their respective opinions to the greatest length, that either the power of man to work out righ-

teousness must exclude the grace of God, or the grace of God must exclude all the effects and endeavors of human reason.

But as inconsistent as they may think these things to be, St. Paul, who was better instructed in the principles of the gospel of Christ than the ancient or the modern teachers of these doctrines can pretend to be, has thought fit to join them together, and has called on all Christians 'to work out their own salvation,' for this very reason, because 'God works in them both to will and to do' If St. Paul be in the right, God's working with us by his grace is so far from being a reason against working for ourselves, that it is the greatest inducement to it, and lays us under the highest obligation to 'give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.'

Let us then consider St. Paul's doctrine, and see what are the natural consequences for a Christian to draw from it.

The words of the text evidently consist of two parts; an exhortation, and an argument by which that exhortation is enforced. The exhortation you have in these words, 'Work our your own salvation with fear and trembling:' the argument to enforce it follows in the next words, 'For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' An argument which may at first sight seem rather to lead to confidence and assurance than to fear and trembling: for if God be for us, who can be against us? or what is there to fear or to tremble at, when we are thus supported and maintained in our spiritual warfare? And the argument is indeed applicable both ways, with respect to different kinds of fear. The disciples of the gospel have many enemies to encounter with, many temptations to struggle with; they are exposed sometimes to death, often to afflictions and persecutions, and almost always to the hatred and contempt of the world. Now with respect to these adversaries, the argument in the text may furnish us with great confidence and assurance, and we may with the Apostle say, 'Who shall harm you, if you be followers of that which is good?' for notwithstanding all the trials you are exposed to, 'God is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.' But as there is a fear which respects our enemies, and is a fear of being conquered and brought into sub-

jection by them; so likewise is there a fear which respects our friends, and is a fear of losing their favor and assistance; and the more a man is dependent on his friends, the greater is, and ought to be, his fear of losing their protection; and this fear naturally inspires us with diligence and care to observe and fulfil the commands of our great patrons, to study their humor and inclination, and to conform ourselves to them. And of this fear the Apostle speaks in the text, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;' for it is a work that you are by no means sufficient for of yourselves; and therefore have a care how you forfeit the favor of him on whom you intirely depend: 'Of yourselves ye can do nothing; for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do.' That St. Paul intends this sort and kind of fear, may be seen by his own way of reasoning. In the beginning of this chapter he presses humility on the Philippians, he warns them against strife and vain-glory, and after some arguments drawn from the example of Christ, and the great reward he obtained to recommend humility to them, as if humility and fear in the present case were the same thing, he thus concludes: 'Wherefore, my beloved, work out your salvation with fear and trembling.' If we believe that God works in us both to will and to do, it will make us humble, because we can do nothing without him; for in such a case what have we to be proud of? Weakness and a state of dependence are inconsistent with confidence and presumption: it will make us likewise fear and tremble, fear to displease, and tremble to disobey him from whom cometh our salvation.

That this fear is the fear of offending God and losing his favor, is farther evident from the next verse, 'Do all things without murmurings and disputings.' Now what fear is it that makes men obey cheerfully, without repining, without seeking for excuses to free themselves? Not the fear of punishment; for who grumble more than slaves? who repine more at their service, or more readily seek and invent pretences to decline the orders of their master? But where the fear that possesses the heart is the fear of disobliging a kind friend, or a beloved master, or a patron on whom we depend, there fear gives wings to obedience, and makes a man all ear and no tongue, ready to

receive but not dispute the command. The following verse supplies us with the like argument: the words are these, 'That ye may be blameless and harmless,' or, as the margin reads it, 'sincere, the sons of God, without rebuke.' Now then the fear the Apostle speaks of is the fear of a son, the fear of offending the father he loves; it is a fear which makes obedience blameless, and sincere, and without rebuke; which no fear can do, but a fear of offending him we love and him we depend on. Other fears may make the hands or the feet obedient; but this fear only reaches the heart, and renders obedience perfect and sincere.

The Christian law indeed, like all other wise laws, is fortified with rewards and punishments; and these rewards and punishments God has proposed to us as motives of obedience; of that obedience which he has promised to accept and reward: and therefore there is no doubt but that those who obey on these motives, shall for their obedience be rewarded.

But this fear cannot here be meant: for first, it will not agree with the Apostle's argument for fearing: for surely it is no reason to fear punishment, that God works in us to will and to do; we should have much much more reason to fear it if he did not: and this help and assistance of God is our greatest comfort and consolation against such fears. Secondly, 'to work out his salvation with fear and trembling,' is the duty of every good Christian. Now to fear punishment is a proper restraint on the evil wills and affections of men, but it is no good man's duty; and yet to such the Apostle speaks, as we may see in the verse of the text, 'Ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence;' and by the character he gives them in the seventh verse of the first chapter, 'Both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye are all partakers of my grace.' Now to these good Christians he says, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling:' this he enjoins them as a thing not only highly becoming their condition, but as necessary to it. But the fear of punishment can never be necessary to any good man's condition, nor can it ever be made matter of precept or command. For the law is not made to instil the fear of punishment into men's hearts; nor is it the design of

the lawgiver to spread fear and terror into the minds of his people: penalties are added to enforce obedience, and therefore concern not those who are ready and willing to obey. It may be matter of wise admonition to Christians to set before them the danger of disobedience, and to exhort them with our blessed Lord to 'fear not those who can only kill the body, but after that can do nothing; but to fear him who has power both over body and soul, and can throw them both into hell-fire:' but when do you ever find it enjoined, as matter of duty, to be afraid of hell? Is it any part of the good subject's obedience to live in perpetual apprehension of racks and gibbets, because racks and gibbets are provided for murderers and robbers? 'Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power?' says our Apostle, 'do that which is good.' So that to fear the power belongs not to him who does good. God has commanded all men to live righteously, and threatened severe punishment to those who live otherwise; but he has no where commanded all men to live in fear of punishment: but the exhortation in the text belongs to all men, it belongs to the most perfect Christians; and therefore the fear in the text is not the fear of punishment, which can neither be matter of command or exhortation to those who do not want it, that is, to all good Christians who from the heart obey the truth. And this may serve to distinguish the fear and trembling mentioned in the text, from the fear which belongs to criminals and slaves; which fear, the Apostle tells us, 'perfect love casteth out.'

But since there is a fear and trembling necessary to the working out of our salvation, and which must and ought to rule the affections of the best of men, let us consider more distinctly the nature of this fear. Now the reason why we ought to fear, is, because 'God worketh in us both to will and to do:' let us examine then how far this argument goes, and that will show us the nature of that fear which is the consequence of it. To will and to do good are the terms and conditions of our salvation; and therefore from whence we have the power to will and to do, from thence we have the means of salvation. Now salvation comprehends in it all the good we are capable of enjoying, without which our life is death, and our hope misery: so that if we depend on God to work in us both to will and to do, we

depend on him for all that is or can be valuable to man. And farther, 'God worketh in us of his own good pleasure:' we have no right or claim to his assistance; freely he gave, and freely he may take away whenever he pleases. Now consider yourself in this state of dependence, and see what it is you have to fear. All your danger is in losing the favor of God; and therefore for that too must be all your fear. Now this fear has more of care and solicitude in it than of terror or amazement: for it is one thing to be afraid of a man, lest he should hurt you, and another thing to be afraid of losing his favor: the first fear is terror, the last is carefulness. So that the text is parallel to that passage in St. Peter, 'Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.' St. Peter, you see, speaks directly of the call and election of Christians; but so far was he from thinking this call and this election to be absolute, that he advises those who have the call and election, to give all diligence to make them sure; plainly teaching us, that though God has called and elected us in Christ, yet it depends on our own care to make them effectual to salvation. It is one certain way to forfeit the gifts of God, not to make use of them; for why should he bestow his gifts in vain? And therefore it is a great argument for diligence and application, that we depend not on our own strength, but the assistance and power of God. As for things which are intirely in our own power, it may possibly be more for our convenience, and as well for our business, to do them to-morrow as to-day: but no man will run this hazard when the thing is in his power to-day, but may be out of his power to-morrow. And this is an argument for immediate care and industry: God worketh in us when he thinks fit; and therefore when he thinks fit you must work too; for his grace will not wait on your humor, and be ready at your beck: and should you neglect the present opportunity, it may be your last; since you have no security but from his good-will and pleasure; and to play with his offers, and neglect his call, is not the way to obtain them. There is no constant care without constant fear. A man will not be careful to perform what he is not afraid to lose; and therefore, in this case, that which is an argument for care, is an argument for fear likewise.

But farther, this fear arises from a sense of our own insuffi-

ciency, and our dependence on God: but our insufficiency is no reason why we should be afraid of God. Because I cannot help myself, it is no argument that I must be afraid of him that can: and since God does help our weakness, it is great reason we should love and adore him, but not that we should dread and fear him. So that the fear that arises from hence, is not in the least degree inconsistent with the perfect love of God. For the same reason that we ought to fear mightily, we ought to love intirely, because 'God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good pleasure.' That it is of his good pleasure that he assists us, is a great evidence of his love to us, and a great argument for our love to him. Since then the cause of this fear is in ourselves, for it arises from our own weakness and inability, we ourselves, properly speaking, are the only objects of this fear. We cannot be afraid of God, because he loves us and helps us; but we may well be afraid of ourselves, lest, being weak and foolish, as we are, we should not use, as we ought to use, the manifold gifts and graces of God. Now then, we are come to that which is indeed the good Christian's fear, his constant fear; and that is, the fear of himself: 'Let him that standeth,' says the Apostle, 'take heed lest he fall.' There is no man so perfect, but that he ought to carry this fear about him; and where his fear points, there must his care and diligence be applied, that is, to himself still: he must watch his passions and affections, lest any of them break out into open enmity against God: his rebel heart must be guarded, lest it quench the holy flame which God has kindled in it, lest it do despite to the Spirit of God, which comes to dwell and inhabit in it. And this is a just and a holy fear, a fear which is not injurious to the love of God towards us; which carries in it no secret mistrust of his kindness or affection, nor is any blemish to our faith or hope in him: nay, it is a security to them all; it preserves the love of God towards us, as it keeps us from those offences which would alienate his love from us: it preserves our faith and hope, by preserving us from those sins which would destroy them, which would render our condition hopeless and our faith vain. So likewise are the care and diligence which proceed from this fear, free from any imputations of arrogance

or presumption. We set not up for ourselves, as if our own arm could save us; but for this very reason we are careful and diligent, because of ourselves we can do nothing: and therefore are we zealous and careful to make use of those powers which God bestows on us. We are always working, but not our own works; but we strive to 'abound in the work of the Lord,' as St. Paul expresses it: we hope to be rewarded for our labor, and yet not for our own, but as the same Apostle assures us, 'we know that our labor in the Lord is not in vain.' If we hope, we hope in the Lord; if we fear, we fear ourselves. 'Perfect love,' says St. John, 'casteth out fear,' that is, the fear of him whom we love. Nor is this fear, thus to be cast out, the fear of God, for he is on our side: but a man's worst enemies are they of his own household; and therefore we justly fear our own hearts and affections, and over them is all our care, 'that we may keep ourselves unspotted from the world.'

From this account of the nature of holy fear, it will be easy to explain what it is to 'work out our salvation with fear and trembling.' God has given us many laws and commands, in obedience to which consisteth our salvation. He has promised us such degrees of assistance as shall enable us to perform the conditions required of us. To do the will of God, to walk in his laws, is to 'work out our salvation.' This to do, under the assistance which God has given us, depends on ourselves: we can miscarry in no point, but in this which is left to ourselves. Here then all our diligence and care is necessary. We are prone to evil and mischief, and it requires our constant application to secure ourselves from falling under the dominion of lust and wickedness: and therefore we must walk circumspectly, watching and observing ourselves; we must be jealous over our own hearts, for out of them 'are the springs of life,' as the wise man tells us. This makes the Christian state to be a spiritual warfare; a state of continual care and watchfulness, of fear and suspicion: so that it is no less than constant employment for a man to walk uprightly with his God. This constant care can come from nothing but a persuasion that it is necessary in our condition; and he that is well convinced of his own weakness will be perpetually afraid of miscarrying; which fear will keep

his diligence awake: so that 'to work out our salvation with fear and trembling,' is with the utmost care and diligence to set ourselves to perform the will and commands of God, to be diligent 'to make our calling and election sure.'

There is, in the language made use of to explain the doctrine of grace, something liable to be abused by ignorant or crafty men. We say that of ourselves we can do nothing; whence they conclude that we have nothing to do. We say that it is the grace of God which enables us to do every thing; from whence they conclude that every thing must be left to the grace of God, and that we need only work ourselves into a strong persuasion that God is at work for us, and may sit still ourselves. And this persuasion, which is generally mere enthusiasm, they dignify with the name of Christian faith.

But let us try this language in a common case, and see whether it be so hard to be understood. Suppose a man wanted to move a weight that required double his strength to move it; would it not be a very proper expression to say, of himself he could do nothing? or would it follow, that if he was offered help, he should sit still, and not put his own strength to the work? If a friend came to his assistance, would it not be properly said that his friend enabled him to do what he did? but would it follow that his friend did all, and he nothing? I mention this only to guard men against being misled by mere sounds; and shall proceed now to consider some consequences of the doctrine and exhortation of the Apostle mentioned in the text.

And first, it is evident that the Christian state is not a state of security; for security is inconsistent with any kind of fear and trembling, and is indeed a condition that does not call even for care or diligence. In a state of security a man cannot even fear for himself; for to be sure of salvation he must be sure of every thing that is necessary to it; and therefore he must either be sure that he is to have no part himself in working out his salvation; or if he is to have any, he must be sure and certain that he shall perform it: either of which excludes all manner of fear and trembling. Much less can he, who is secure of being saved, fear being punished; so that there is no kind of

fear left for him; and the Apostle's exhortation will have no meaning in it to such a man. 'Work out your salvation with fear and trembling:' with fear of what? since nothing is left to be afraid of. And yet to be sure of our salvation has been made by some a necessary sign of regeneration and adoption: and hence has proceeded the doctrine, that grace once received can never be lost; and if so, those who have received grace, can have no reason to fear and tremble. And yet it cannot be denied that the Philippians, to whom the Apostle writes, had received grace; since from his own testimony we learn, 'that they had obeyed always; that in his bonds, and in the doctrine and confirmation of the gospel, they had been partakers of his grace.' Grace then they had received; what then had they to fear? if grace once received cannot be lost, that is, if grace gives security of salvation. To make then the Apostle consistent with himself, we must affirm that it is his doctrine that grace may be lost; and that even those who have made great progress in gospel obedience, are not secure of their state; but must labor on, and work on with fear and trembling, lest they come short of the promises that they have received. And from hence we may comfort and support good Christians, under the many fears and misgivings of mind that attend them in their spiritual warfare. That you fear, is no argument of mistrusting God: we have reason to fear for ourselves; nor will this fear be taken from us, till we are removed out of this world. Were there any reason to think that security as to our future condition was among the gifts of God's Spirit to the true children of Christ, then indeed our fears would be matter of disturbance to us: but since the best must fear and tremble, why should we disquiet ourselves because we fear for ourselves? since not only our present condition requires it, but it is even part of our security to fear, and to labor with care and diligence, which is the blessed fruit of holy fear. To fear that God will not perform his promises to us, is a wicked fear: but to fear that we may fall short of those promises, is a reasonable fear, our present weakness considered; and it is a spur to virtue. And those who would desire this thorn in the flesh to be removed, may be answered in the Lord's name, as he answered St. Paul, 'My

grace is sufficient for you.' You are weak, but the Lord is strong, and his strength is perfected in weakness: so that if your fear be active and busy, and sets you to work for the thing you are afraid to lose, there is no doubt but that through Christ you shall be enabled to do all things.

Secondly, from hence we may learn what to think of the works of Christians. It is, you see, the Apostle's command, 'Work out your salvation.' Now then works are necessary to salvation; and it matters little in what degree they are necessary, or how they are to be named: if they are necessary, you must do them; and that is enough to secure the practice of virtue and holiness in the world. And for this reason God works in us, that we may not only will, but do; that is, bring our good inclinations to perfection: for why does God work in us to will and to do, if willing and doing are not necessary to our redemption? And perhaps the good works of Christians may not deserve all the hard words that have so liberally been bestowed on them, if we consider that they are not the works of men, but of God: 'for he worketh in us to will and to do:' and therefore our good works are the fruits of his Spirit; and are holy because they proceed from a holy root, the power of God dwelling in us.

Lastly, hence likewise we may observe in what manner God works for the faithful: St. Paul makes it an argument for fear and diligence; from whence it is evident that God does not so work in us, as to exclude our own care and industry; that is, he does not work irresistibly: for supposing God to work irresistibly, the wit of man cannot make an argument out of it for private care and diligence. If God does every thing in us whether we will or no, what is left for us to do? or what have we to fear and tremble for, when God alone has undertaken the whole care and business of our redemption? The work of the Spirit on the hearts of the faithful is to actuate and inspire them: but to perform what is good is the business of him who is actuated and inspired. Now it must be allowed that it is one thing to give a man power to act, another to force him to act. A man's will is not influenced by his own power. He that has ten times the power to do a thing that I have, is nevertheless as free to let it alone as I am. And though the grace of God

gives us great power and ability to work out our salvation, yet the power to will and to work is no constraint either to will or to work. And in this sense the grace of God is a great argument for diligence and care: for if he furnishes us with power, it behoves us to see that we make a right use of it.

In a word then, you have the assistance of God to enable you to work; which is a great reason to love and trust him, since he takes this care of you. Your danger now is only from yourself; it is in your own power, but in no other creature's under heaven, to defeat your hopes. You only can rob yourself of the assistance of God by doing despite to his Holy Spirit, by not obeying when it is in your power to obey. Be careful therefore, my brethren, be watchful over yourselves; and whilst you have opportunity, 'work out your salvation.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XIX.

LUKE, CHAP. XIII.—VERSES 23, 24.

INTRODUCTION; concerning the many nice speculations that have arisen regarding God's final judgment of mankind. One of these proposed to our Saviour in the text; in which and the following verses his answer is recorded; an answer applicable not only to this, but to other questions of the like import: for the better understanding of this answer we must consider why men, not content to examine themselves by the law of God, are for launching out into the mysteries of his judgment. They are commonly influenced by a consideration of their own circumstances. Every man leaves the way open to his own salvation, though he may bar it against others: this the case with the great advocates of election and reprobation: being secured themselves, they despise the virtues and moral attainments of all men, and doom them to destruction. The conceit of him who asked the question in the text shown to be akin to this, from the peculiar prejudices of the privileged Jews. Our Lord's answer is levelled against these prejudices, and is a declaration that the salvation of God should be extended to all people. The controversy among Christians concerning the salvation of the heathen world, shown to turn on a different point from that of the Jewish prejudice; and to carry not with it the same contempt of mankind: still the limitation of God's mercy may be found to be as presumptuous in the one case as in the other. The answer of our Lord in the text given to such inquirers, both for instruction and for rebuke. The opinions already mentioned confine the

mercy of God; but there is another which goes to the contrary extreme, and sets the doors of heaven open to all comers: they who entertain it seem to rely intirely on God's mercy and the infirmity of human nature, both of which they paint in the strongest colors: they suppose that God will never make all, or most men miserable, and therefore think to escape in the crowd. Such inquirers as these shown to make a mistake in their reckoning; for if it were just to punish sinners, no reason why twenty should not be punished as well as ten, or one hundred as well as twenty: men shown not to be of so great value in the eyes of God: these persons therefore are exhorted to leave others to God's justice and mercy, and *strive* themselves *to enter in at the strait gate.*

As our Saviour did not think fit to satisfy the curiosity of the inquirer, it is very presumptuous in any one else to pretend to answer his question: natural religion will not satisfy us on this head, nor can it be expected that Scripture should do so. Two things however there are in which every man has a right to require satisfaction: one relates to the method of God's dealing with men, and comes to this,—whether all men are capable; and, if not, who are capable of salvation? The other relates to our own conduct and behavior; and is—on what terms may we expect salvation? These two necessary inquiries our Saviour clearly and expressly answers: as to the first, he tells us that salvation belongs to all men, of all climes: as to the second, he declares that all the workers of iniquity will be excluded from the presence of God, and therefore exhorts us to *strive to enter in at the strait gate;* and in order to quicken us, he says farther, that *many who seek to enter, shall not be able.* Being thus instructed, what right have we to demand more? It is not necessary either for a teacher of religion to declare more, or for a learner to know more: the effect of knowing more would be injurious, both to good and to bad men: this point enlarged on; and if it can serve no good pur-

pose to know the certainty of our own future condition, what can it serve to know that of others? such a curiosity irreligious: no wonder therefore that it is not gratified. Absurd to expect judgment before trial. The scope which men give to their imaginations on this subject, when they leave their only sure guide, the word of God, shown to be always dangerous, sometimes fatal. Conclusion: the necessity of each person resolving to take care of himself, which is a sufficient employment.

DISCOURSE XIX.

LUKE, CHAP. XIII.—VERSE 23, 24.

Then said one unto him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And he said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.

THE fate of the world at the great day is so momentous a point, and in which every man, who is conscious to himself that he is accountable for his actions, is so nearly concerned, that it is no wonder to find men in every age inquisitive and curious to pry into this event. Hence have arisen many nice speculations concerning God's final judgment of mankind: sometimes we are asked, whether, consistently with the declarations of the gospel, any of the heathen world can be saved; and sometimes, whether, the strictness of the gospel morality considered, and the visible corruption of the world, it must not necessarily come to pass that the far greater part of mankind shall perish everlastingly.

One of these questions you see proposed to our Saviour in the text, 'Lord, are there few that be saved?' You have also our Lord's answer in the text, and in the verses which follow it in St. Luke: an answer applicable not only to this, but to all other questions of the like import; and which therefore very well deserves your consideration.

For the better understanding of which answer, we must consider whence it is that men, not content to examine themselves by the law of God, and to learn from thence how their own case stands, are for launching out into the mysteries of God's judgments, and inquiring how it shall fare with this or that nation at the general judgment, and whether many or few shall be saved at the last.

Whoever will examine into the bottom of men's thoughts on

this subject, will find that the conclusion they make is commonly influenced by the consideration of their own circumstances. Every man in this case takes care of himself, and leaves the way open to his own salvation, how strongly soever he bars it against others. The great advocates of election and reprobation always reckon themselves in the number of the elect; and that their iniquities, of which they are often conscious, may not rise up against them, they maintain that the act of man cannot make void the purpose of God, or the sins of the elect deprive them of the benefit of God's eternal decree. Thus secured, they despise the virtues and moral attainments of all men, and doom them with all their virtues to destruction; whilst they advance themselves with all their sins to a throne of glory prepared for them before the world began.

Akin to this was his conceit who asked our Saviour the question, 'Are there few that shall be saved?' The Jews were God's peculiar people, and enjoyed very great privileges: 'unto them were committed the oracles of God; to them pertained the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.' But not content with these privileges, and being thus distinguished by God, they will hardly allow God to have any thing to do with the rest of the world, unless it were by severe judgments to afflict and to destroy them. With regard to these prejudices it is that St. Paul puts the question to his countrymen, 'Is God the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles?' And we know full well that the gospel of Christ gave greater offence to the Jews in no one particular, than in opening the door of salvation to the Gentile world: they looked on all nations but their own to be unclean, and accounted it 'an unlawful thing for a man that was a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation:' and St. Peter was so possessed with this opinion, that he stood in need of a special warning from heaven, before he would baptize the honest centurion Cornelius. On the foot of this prejudice the question is put to our Lord, 'Are there few that shall be saved?' He who knew what was in man, and understood their secret thoughts, gave an answer which went to the bottom of the inquirer's heart, and without doubt touched him to the

quick; 'There shall,' says he, 'be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the Prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And behold there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.' This part of the answer was levelled directly against the Jewish prejudice, and is a plain declaration that the salvation of God should be extended to east and west, north and south, to people of all parts of the world; and that many, who thought themselves alone entitled to God's favor in virtue of their peculiar privileges, should for their misconduct and misbehavior be finally excluded from his presence.

The controversy which has been managed among Christians, concerning the salvation of the heathen world, turns on quite another point than the Jewish prejudice did. It carries not with it the same contempt of mankind. The Jews thought none worthy to be sons of God but themselves: Christians think all worthy, and are desirous that all should be made partakers of the glory of God. The Jews thought no nation but their own capable of being received into the covenant of God, and therefore doomed all to destruction without remedy: the Christian thinks every nation capable of being admitted into the covenant of Christ; his only doubt is, whether any nation, not received into the covenant, is capable of the benefits of it. But then considering the infinite numbers of men already dead, without any knowlege of the gospel, and the great number still which probably will die in the same circumstance; this notion entertained by some Christians, with respect to such persons, seems to be as peremptory and relentless as the prejudice of the Jews. And the limitation put on God's mercy and goodness may be found perhaps to be as presumptuous, and as injurious to the honor and majesty of God in one case as in the other. What then must we say to such inquirers as these? The answer in the text is given them both for their instruction and their rebuke; 'Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.' As if our Lord had said, You seem, by your curiosity in in-

quiring after the state of others, to be secure and at ease about your own. But turn your thoughts from others to yourself: as great as your advantages and privileges are, your way is still strait and narrow: strive therefore and labor to secure your own entrance into life; for many of those who have equal privileges with you, and profess to seek the kingdom of God, shall not enter into it.

As the opinions hitherto mentioned confine the mercy of God within a narrow compass, and leave the greater part of mankind under desperate circumstances; so there is another which goes into the contrary extreme, and sets the doors of heaven open to all comers, with little or no regard to the different qualifications of men. They who can make no title to the kingdom of God under the terms of the gospel, or by the rules of virtue and morality, not willing to give themselves up to destruction, have persuaded themselves and others that it is impossible that God should finally doom to misery so many of his creatures, as must necessarily suffer if they are to be judged by the strict rules of morality, or the no less strict rules of the gospel. And having no hope but in the mercy of God, no excuse but in the infirmities and weaknesses of human nature, necessity makes them eloquent on this subject; and the finest things are said to display the goodness of God, and set it forth in the liveliest colors; and to represent the distress of nature, and the utter inability of man to do good in this fallen degenerate state. Thus concluding all men under sin, they hope to escape in the crowd; it would be inexorable cruelty, they think, to make all or most men miserable; and therefore, let God be good, and all men be sinners, and they are safe.

To such inquirers as these, we say, that they mistake in all their reckoning; for if it be just to punish sinners, no reason can be given why twenty should not be punished as well as ten, or an hundred as well as twenty. There were sinners enough in the world to have saved the world at the general deluge, if numbers would have done. When Sodom was destroyed, ten righteous men would have saved the city; but the number of the wicked was never pleaded in bar of justice. Neither does the race of men make so considerable a figure in the system of the universe, as to endanger the whole, if they miscarry. Let

men be sinners, yet God will not want those who will serve and obey him: or if he should, let him speak the word, and millions will arise at his command: 'Think not therefore to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our Father; for God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.' If all men should forsake him, he can, when he pleases, repair the loss: he is not so weak, or in such want of the service of men, as to be guided by such politic reasons as oftentimes, reasonably enough, prevail with temporal princes to spare an offending multitude. Leave therefore the rest of the world to the judgment and mercy of God, and mind you the law that is set before you as the condition of life, and 'strive to enter in at the strait gate.'

You see by this account that our Saviour did not think fit to answer the curiosity of this inquirer: and since he declined the question, who alone was able to resolve it, it is absurd to ask the question of any body else; and it is great presumption in any body else to pretend to answer it. From natural religion we may learn much of the equity and justice of God, and of the terms of obedience on which we may hope to partake of his mercy: but how many, or how few, will act by the laws of reason, and qualify themselves for the mercy of God, natural reason and religion can never show. Nor is there any reason to expect a resolution of this doubt in the books of Scripture; for had it been a piece of knowlege proper to be communicated to us, why was it not declared by our Lord, when the question was so fairly stated to him? or why does he give such an answer here, as is plainly calculated not to satisfy the curiosity of mankind in this great point, but to restrain and to rebuke it? The question is, 'Are there few that be saved?' The answer is in effect, What is that to you? mind your own business, and 'strive to enter in at the strait gate.'

Two things there are, in which every man has a right to require satisfaction, and without which he can on no reasonable grounds pretend to religion: one relates to the method of God's dealing with mankind, and comes to this point, Whether all men are capable; and if not all, who are capable of salvation? The other relates to our own conduct and behavior, and resolves itself into this inquiry, On what terms we may expect

salvation? Now, as to these two necessary inquiries, our Saviour is so far from avoiding them, that he has expressly and clearly determined them. As to the first, he has told us that salvation belongs to all men, of every country and nation; and that the kingdom of heaven is open to receive those who come from the east and west, from the north and south. As to the second, he declares that all the workers of iniquity will be excluded from the presence of God; and therefore exhorts us to 'strive to enter in at the strait gate:' and, to quicken our diligence, and to raise in us a concern equal to the interest we have at stake, he informs us farther, 'that many who will seek to enter, shall not be able.' Being thus far instructed, what farther demand have you on your teachers? Would you know before-hand what your lot will be? and whether you shall be in the number of those who shall seek and find, or among those who would enter in, but shall not be able? What has a teacher of religion to do in this matter? Is it ever expected of a law-giver, that he should tell who will obey and be happy, and who will transgress the law and be punished? Nay, what has a learner in religion to do with this point? Do you want to be made either careless or desperate? Is either state a desirable one to a man disposed to be seriously religious? But you may think perhaps that it would have another effect on you; that it will give great ease and satisfaction to your mind to be secure as to your future condition, and enable you with great cheerfulness to bear all the hardships and discouragements to which virtue stands exposed. I am indeed persuaded that this effect would often follow; that many righteous would be resolutely righteous, and act with views above this world, and as citizens of another country, on certain assurance given them of future glory. But consider, the terms on which we are to be happy in another world must be such as are consistent with our state and condition in this. It is impossible to imagine it to be reasonable for God to place us in this world, and then to give such hopes of another, as should render us unfit to support the several characters imposed on us here. And it is much to be doubted whether the best men would not be rendered useless to this world by such security given for their own future happiness

as some seem to desire. They would probably be lost in the prospect of their own future happiness, and grow stupid to the world, and act as if they did, in the literal sense, hate father and mother, brother and sister: whereas now the sense of religion under which they live, the necessity they know themselves to be under to work out their own salvation, obliges them to discharge all the offices and duties of life regularly and honorably; since there is no way of securing our happiness in another world, but by doing all the good we can in this.

And if this sort of knowlege would probably render good men useless to the world, it would certainly render bad men exceedingly pernicious to it. Despair is the height of madness; and were all bad men to be made mad and outrageous, it would perhaps be hard to find keepers to guard them, and to protect the rest of mankind from their fury. To live amongst men who knew themselves destined to eternal misery, what else would it be but living among the damned, and being exposed to all their malice and revenge, made ten times more malicious and revengeful by their despair?

But if it can serve no good purpose to communicate to us this knowlege with respect to ourselves and our own future state and condition, what purpose can it possibly serve to give us this knowlege with respect to others and their future condition? What is it to us to know the exact proportion between the good and bad, or to know how many or how few shall finally miscarry? Would this knowlege alter our own condition in any respect? Would it affect the terms of our obedience, or make it easier for us to work out our own salvation? If not, to what purpose is it desired? unless perhaps you secretly imagine that God means not to execute his threatenings against sinners, but will save all at the last; and you want to be let into this secret that you may sin without fear. If this be indeed your case, do you not see that your curiosity is irreligious, and springs from a corrupted heart, which wants to be freed from the fear of hell, only to enjoy the pleasure of sin? And can you still wonder why God does not gratify such a curiosity as this, and reveal the secret mysteries of his providence, to encourage you in vice and immorality? It wants but

little reflexion in this case to see that the reason why this knowlege is desired, is a very good reason why it should not be granted.

In general it is very absurd to expect that judgment should go before trial; and therefore, as this life is a state of trial, and is naturally to be followed by a day of judgment, it is unnatural to declare the final state of men before their trial is over; and with respect to any judgment but the judgment of God, it is impossible; for no other just judge can tell what his sentence will be before the trial is over.

The scope which men give to their imaginations on this subject, when they leave their only sure guide, the word of God, is always dangerous, and oftentimes fatal to them. If you are contented to take God's word for the method he intends to pursue in the judging of the world, you will soon see that, in order to be happy, you must be good. If you want restraint, the threatenings of God are terrible: if you want comfort, the promises of the gospel are the only proper cordial for penitent sinners. Thus you will find yourself equally guarded against presumption and despair, so long as you follow the light of God's word. But if you indulge your own conceit, and imagine that God will be either better or worse to you than he has declared, you expose yourself to manifest peril. If in the gaiety of your heart you imagine God means little by his threatenings, and made use of them only to deter men from vice, without ever intending a rigorous execution, it is very probable that you will take advantage of your own discovery, and abate as much in your own goodness as you do in God's severity. If you are of a colder constitution, and more inclined to melancholic thoughts, your imagination will show you God clothed only with terrors: and your heart, oppressed with fear, will sink, and leave you no courage to go on with the duties of religion, from which your fears will suffer you to have no hope or expectation.

If you extend your thoughts farther, and lay schemes for the general judgment of the world, it is well if this unnecessary concern for others does not prove prejudicial to yourself. If you confine the mercies of God to yourself and your own sect only, it is an opinion which not only ascribes great partiality to God, but it tends to introduce cruelty and inhumanity into the

temper of every man so persuaded. We easily come to think it a virtue to hate those whom God hates; and then the consequence is, that there must be a stop to all intercourse of good offices with all men, the few only excepted who think as we think. And thus, by passing a rash judgment in a dark mysterious point, and which of all others does least concern us, we shall extinguish the noblest grace of the gospel, the plainest duty of a Christian, and which of all others does most affect the peace and happiness of mankind.

If, in honor to the mercy of God, you open the doors of heaven to men of all professions in the world, who live well according to the measure of light bestowed on them; though your opinion has in it much more humanity and more common sense than that before-mentioned, yet, by thus dealing to all indifferently graces and mercies which are not in your disposal, it is well if you do not hazard your own share. It is this opinion, if I am not deceived, that leads many into contempt of the gospel of Christ Jesus; for when they think all religions equally good, and all men equally secure who follow their religion, be it what it will, they raise unawares a question which they cannot answer, namely, to what purpose was the gospel given? For if all men are equally secure under all religions, what can be the advantage of one religion above another? When men are led into this inextricable maze, by setting up themselves for judges of the world, they know not where to fix: they lose all regard to the best and purest religion, by doing such professed and undeserved honor to the worst.

You see then how useless, how dangerous a thing it is, to go out of our way to meddle with things so far above us. If you would resolve to take care of one, that resolution would furnish you with sufficient employment: for be your advantages ever so great, yet all who have your advantages will not be saved; for of those who seek to enter, many will not be able; and many, of whom you little think, may perhaps go before you; for God has those whom he will own, in the east and the west, and the north and the south. Leave him to find out those whom he will honor, and look you to the point which is indeed your true, your only concern, the salvation of your own soul, and 'strive to enter in at the strait gate.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XX.

LUKE, CHAP. XII.—VERSE 48.

THE equity of the general rule in the text is so apparent as to need no explanation: the single mite of a poor widow is an offering fit for God, which from a rich man would hardly be decent charity to a poor widow: and this is the case wherever the rule is applicable. Yet we are very apt to mistake this general maxim in its application to particular cases; for then self-love and self-interest overlook the true proportion of those things from which its equity arises: this proved by the mutual claims of men on each other, who always overrate the abilities of others, or undervalue their own, as suits their purpose: hence we seldom please our superiors, or satisfy our inferiors. As this rule has place in all the offices of life, it ought especially to influence the distribution of rewards and punishments; but the weakness and the wickedness of men have almost wholly excluded it from human courts of judicature: this point enlarged on. Could we but introduce a judge endowed with a perfect knowlege of men's hearts, the text would be the rule of court: and since there is such a judge and such a court, we must attend to the application of it to ourselves, since mistakes will finally be fatal; and there is so much the more reason for our care, as we are apt to make such unreasonable allowances for ourselves. We often see men, who have no hopes of being justified by the terms of the gospel, take shelter in the general declaration of the text, and imagine they see an equity in their case, which shall stand between them and the rigor of the gospel law: perceiving plainly a connexion between crime and

punishment, and being conscious of crimes, they have no way to ward off punishment: but when they think on the text, they immediately infer that to whomsoever *little* is given, of him *little* shall be required; hence they conclude that all their errors and mistakes are well secured, &c. This is one step towards justification; but this is overruled by conscience: they then urge that the power of executing what is commanded is necessary to make men accountable; they recollect all their temptations and excitements; and being partial judges, conclude it was not possible for them to do otherwise than they did; and thus secured, they fancy themselves fit to appear before Christ, and there to plead his own rule of equity against the precepts of the gospel. Allow this plea, and it will justify all men; though it must reflect dishonor on their Maker, who has by reason and revelation declared a judgment to come. Few men are so bad as to choose wickedness for its own sake; error or passion is pleaded in all cases. The Canaanites were greatly in error, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah had violent passions; yet the fire of heaven spared not these, nor the sword of Joshua those. Did they then sin, or was the judge unjust? But if men's passions are so strong that reason is of no use but to contrive means for their gratification, God cannot be justified in giving to such creatures any notion of a judgment to come; and how irreconcileable it is with his goodness, to arm the little reason we have against us, so that it shall always place fears before us, which yet can have no relation to us. To clear this matter, we must consider two things: I. to what instances this rule of the text is extended by our Saviour and his Apostles: II. how far we may extend and apply it by parity of reason to other cases. To bring this inquiry within proper bounds, we must observe, in the first place, that the rule of the text is never applied in Scripture to excuse immoral actions on account of the violence of temptation; since even to indulge the passion is imputed as sin: *he that hateth his brother*, says the Apostle,

is a murderer: this topic enlarged on. St. James also (i. 13—15.) describes all sin as the effect of inordinate passion, which is not only no excuse, but is said to *bring forth death.* Scripture has recorded the immoral actions of many persons, but lust and passions were no excuse for them: this exemplified in the case of Ahab, who slew Naboth, and of David, who slew Uriah. In the verses before the text our Saviour puts the case of those who received much, and those who received less: of the latter he says, *they shall be beaten* for doing things *worthy of stripes;* whence it appears that the strength of passion gives to rational beings no hope of being saved. Now the comparison in Scripture lies between those who enjoy the light of the gospel, who are said in the text *to have received much,* and those who are directed only by the light of reason; and these are they *who have received little.* Now the verses before the text, together with the text itself, state exactly the condition of these two sorts of people; from which we learn that to know the will of the Lord consists in having the light of God's word to direct us: for they *who knew not* the will of their Lord, are yet supposed to *do things worthy of stripes;* which supposes them possessed of the light of reason, and the knowlege of good and evil. Secondly: sinners, under all circumstances, are condemned to punishment; both they who know their Lord's will, but do not according to it, and they who do things *worthy of stripes,* i. e. who not knowing his will, act contrary to the light which they possess: this exactly agrees with what St. Paul has declared in Rom. ii. 12. All however will be judged and punished in proportion to their knowlege; which general determination agrees with a more particular one in Luke x. 13. 14. Explanation of these verses, showing the opinion of the Jews and of Christ himself on them. If we consider the world as divided into two parts, the one living under the light and direction of God's word, the other guided by mere reason and nature, we may learn from the maxim of the text—I. that no man shall be judged by a law of

which he had no knowlege; it being true of every moral action, what St. Paul affirms of alms-giving; *it shall be accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to what he hath not*:—II. that immoral actions admit of no excuse, but will subject every man to the judgment of God; morality not being founded primarily on the authority of revelation, but of reason, for the use of which every one must answer: to plead therefore passion or temptation as an excuse for acting against reason, is the same as to plead our iniquity as an excuse against punishment; therefore, says St. James, *to him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is sin.* It may be said that custom and education have rendered the notions of morality different, so that the things which appear worthy of stripes to some, seem to others to contain nothing criminal in them. Be it so: yet this avails nothing in the present argument: where there is no consciousness of sin, there is no room to look for excuses; and whatever allowance may be made for those who sin without knowlege, it is certain that all who contrive excuses can take no advantage of this: for the very excuse itself shows the consciousness of sin: it is a foolish thing to deceive ourselves into an opinion that we require not pardon: repentance may cause forgiveness of sins, but no wit of man can ever justify them.—III. It appears that all who know the will of God, and live under the light of the gospel, shall be judged thereby. Men act sometimes as if they might choose what law they would be judged by; for as soon as they profess natural religion, they seem satisfied that they shall be judged by their own notions; but if the gospel of Christ be, as it is indeed, the will of God, it will not be so easily dismissed: we may neglect the advice of a friend, but the law of our superior must be obeyed. True, you may perhaps say; but this is the very thing we cannot admit, viz. that it is the law of our superior. Beware, from the dreadful examples of Chorazin and Bethsaida, of Tyre and Sidon, that your persuasion be not your crime. Here then is your case;

you have the gospel of Christ before you; it claims your obedience on the most extraordinary credentials; it cannot therefore be an indifferent matter whether you receive or reject this law; and you therefore come under the rule of the text. The gospel is a call to repentance from dead works, a summons to turn to the living God in works of righteousness and holiness: this the forewarning of John the Baptist; this the doctrine of our Lord and his Apostles. If then the great promises of Christ belong only to penitents, who in newness of heart turn to God, how sadly do men impose on themselves, who trust to be saved by God's mercy, without doing his work, and continue in sin that grace may abound: this subject enlarged on to the end.

DISCOURSE XX.

LUKE, CHAP. XII.—VERSE 48.

Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.

THE equity of this general rule is so apparent to common sense, that it admits of no dispute, and calls for no explanation. A single mite offered by a poor widow is a present fit for the King of heaven, which from the hand of a rich man would hardly be a decent charity to a poor widow. And thus the case is in all instances to which the rule is applicable.

But plain as this general maxim is, yet we are very apt to mistake in the application of it to particular cases: for then self-love and self-interest will not permit us to discern that true proportion of one thing to another, from which the equity of the rule arises. If we have any claim to make in our own behalf, we think nothing too much, and are apt to overrate the ability of the person on whom we have the demand, and to expect from him much more than he in reason ought to grant: if any claim be on us, we are ready enough to excuse ourselves, to dissemble, or to undervalue our power, and consequently to do less than may in reason and justice be required from us. Hence it is that we are rarely pleased with those who are above us, and seldom able to satisfy those who are below us.

As this rule has place in the intercourse of all the offices of life, so ought it especially to influence the distribution of rewards and punishments: but the weakness and wickedness of men have almost totally excluded it from human judicatures. For as it is in every body's power to pretend ignorance of the law, or some other inability, in excuse for the crimes for which

they are to answer; were the plea as easily admitted as it is pleaded, it would open a door to all kind of licentiousness, and take off the fear of punishment, which is so necessary a restraint upon the depraved inclinations of men: and since the wisest and ablest judges cannot discern, some few cases perhaps excepted, between real and affected ignorance; or so distinguish the powers and abilities of one man from another, as to proportion rewards and punishments according to this rule; therefore the law puts all, except those who are manifestly deficient in reason, upon the same level, and supposes every man to know the law of his country; and consequently, where a malicious act is proved, a malicious intention is implied, and the criminal is sentenced accordingly.

But how justifiable soever this proceeding is, on the necessity there is for it in order to maintain some tolerable degree of peace and quiet in the world; yet it is evident that these general presumptions, on which all human judicatures proceed, do not leave room for an exact distribution of justice; but it often happens that men are made equal in the punishment, whose crimes, could all circumstances be considered, were not equal.

But could you introduce a judge endowed with the perfect knowlege of men's hearts, there would be an end of all such general presumptions: he would do in every case what was exactly right and equitable; and the only standing rule of the court, would be that of the text, 'Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required.'

One such court there is in which he who knows the secrets of every heart will sit judge himself; before whose tribunal there will want no evidence to convict the guilty, no advocates to defend the innocent: there no pretended excuse will be admitted, no real one excluded: there every man with all his actions, with all his talents and abilities, and all his opportunities of knowing the will of God, will be weighed in the balance; and 'unto whom much was given, of him shall much be required.'

Since then we are to be judged, and finally sentenced, by this rule, it concerns us to be careful in the application of it to ourselves; for if we mistake, we shall gain only a deceitful security, and which at the last will prove fatal: and there is

the more reason for this care, considering how apt men are to make unreasonable allowances to themselves, where their own interest is concerned.

It is no uncommon thing for men who have no hopes of being justified by the terms of the gospel, to take shelter in this general declaration, and to imagine that they see an equity in their own case, which shall stand between them and the rigorous execution of the gospel law. When they read in the New Testament, that all whoremongers and adulterers, all drunkards and riotous persons, all extortioners and fraudulent dealers, in a word, all who in any manner injure their neighbours and fellow-creatures, shall without doubt perish everlastingly; they plainly perceive that the crimes and the punishment are so inseparably annexed, that, being conscious of the crimes, they have no way to ward off the punishment. But when they read that 'unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required,' and infer from thence that unto whomsoever little is given, of him shall little be required; they immediately conclude that all their errors and mistakes, of what kind soever, are well secured: for whoever is in error, be it through want of understanding, or of the external means of knowlege, or be it through passion and prejudices, does, so long as the error continues, want the light, and is so far to be considered as one to whom little is given. This is one step towards their justification; but still conscience remains, and proves that they had the light in many instances in which they have been offenders. But then they consider that, to render a man accountable for his actions, it is not enough that he knows the terms of his duty, he must also have power to put them in execution: for no man ought to be punished for not acting, who never had it in his power to act, or for doing what was not in his power to avoid doing. Being thus far advanced, they recollect all the temptations and incitements they met with, and how strongly their passions were moved to the commission of those iniquities of which their conscience accuses them; and being judges disposed to favor the criminal, they conclude it was not in their power to do otherwise than they did; and since so little was given them, they shall be answerable but for little: and thus secured, they imagine they may safely appear before the

judgment-seat of Christ, and plead to him his own rule of equity against all the peremptory laws of his gospel.

Allow this plea, and it will indeed justify all men, and leave no room for judgment; but it must reflect great dishonor and reproach on him who made them, and has declared to them a judgment to come, as well by the reason which he has given them, as by the revelation which he has published.

Few men are so essentially wicked as to choose wickedness for its own sake; either error or passion is pleaded in all cases. The Canaanites who worshipped the work of men's hands, were greatly in error; and the wicked inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah had strong unnatural passions: but these by fire from heaven, and those by the sword of Joshua, were rooted out. Which part now would you take? Were they sinners, or was the Judge of all the world unjust?

If men are really of such a make, that their passions are too strong for their reason, and reason of no use but to contrive means for the satisfaction of the passions and appetites; it is impossible to justify God in giving such creatures any notion of a judgment to come: for to what purpose does it serve but to plague and torment them unnecessarily? And how is it reconcileable with the goodness of God, to plant such seeds of misery in our very nature? to arm the little reason we have against us, which is perpetually placing fears and terrors before us, which yet have, can have, no relation to us?

In order to clear this matter, there are two things proper to be considered:

First, to what instances this rule of the text is extended by our blessed Saviour and his Apostles.

Secondly, how far we may extend and apply this rule by parity of reason to other cases.

That we may bring this inquiry within proper bounds, it is fit to observe, in the first place, that the rule of the text is never applied in Scripture to extenuate or excuse immoral actions on account of the violence of the temptation from whence they proceed. So far from it, that even indulging the passion is imputed as sin, though the immoral wicked action does not ensue: 'He that hateth his brother,' says an Apostle, is a murderer; and 'he that looketh on a woman to lust after

her,' says our blessed Saviour, 'hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.' If the case be so, if hatred has in it the guilt of murder, and lust has the guilt of adultery; how shall murder be excused because it proceeds from violent hatred, or adultery because it proceeds from violent lust? St. James has plainly condemned the profaneness of justifying our iniquities by accusing our constitutions, and consequently by accusing him who made us: 'Let no man say when he is tempted I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death:' James i. 13, 14, 15. All sin is here described to be the effect of violent and inordinate lust and passion: but this is so far from being considered as an excuse for sin, that it immediately follows that sin so produced 'bringeth forth death.' The Scripture has recorded to us the immoral actions of many persons; but is there any instance where such immoralities are pitied or excused, because of the lust and passions from whence they proceeded? Nay, however apt men are to make such excuses for themselves, they are not apt to make them for others. When you read that Ahab slew Naboth, are you not apt to say, poor man, how could he help it, for he longed extremely for his vineyard? When you read that David slew Uriah and corrupted his wife, do you excuse his iniquity because his passion was strong? If you do, it is more than he did for himself; for when he came to himself he cried, 'I have sinned against the Lord:' which one sorrowful confession of his iniquity was worth a thousand of the excuses which men usually make in like cases. In the verses before the text, our Saviour puts the case of those who have received much and of those who have received less: of those who received least he says, 'They shall be beaten' for doing things 'worthy of stripes:' by which it appears that all who have sense to distinguish between good and evil are subject to judgment: and no hope is given them of being saved by the strength of their passion, when they act against the light of their reason.

But there will be occasion to consider this particular again,

in stating the case or cases to which the rule of the text is applied in Scripture.

Now the rule, as applied in Scripture, does chiefly concern those who enjoy the light of God's word, and have the advantages of the gospel to enable them to work out their salvation; these are they who are said in the text 'to have received much:' and the comparison lies between them and the rest of the world, who have the light of reason only to direct them; and these last mentioned, compared with the others, are they 'who have received little.'

The case of these two sorts of people is very accurately stated in the verses before the text, which must therefore be considered: 'That servant,' says our blessed Saviour, 'which knew his Lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required.'

The case, you see, is put with respect to sinners under the different circumstances of knowing, and not knowing, the will of their Lord. What we are to understand by the 'will of their Lord' will appear, if we consider that they who 'knew not' the will of their Lord, are yet supposed here to 'do things worthy of stripes;' which supposes them to have the light of reason, and a knowlege of the difference between good and evil: for no man can in a moral sense be said to do things worthy of stripes, unless he has reason to distinguish between the things which are, and which are not, worthy of stripes. Since therefore they who have this light of reason are yet supposed 'not to know their Lord's will,' it is evident that 'to know the will of our Lord' implies something more than having the light of reason to direct us; and consequently must mean our having the light of God's word for our direction.

Secondly, you see that sinners under all circumstances are condemned to punishment. They who knew their Lord's will are condemned for not doing 'according to his will;' they who knew not his will are not condemned for not doing according to the rule of which they had no knowlege, but they are sentenced for committing things 'worthy of stripes,' that is, such things as

they, according to the light they had, knew to be sinful. And this agrees exactly with what St. Paul to the Romans has declared: 'As many as have sinned without law, shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.'

But then, as the knowlege of God's will is a great advantage to those who know it, so will their punishment be in proportion greater, if they offend against this knowlege: they therefore 'shall be beaten with many stripes.' Others, though their iniquities and offences against the light of reason which God gave them shall not go unpunished; yet shall their punishment be mitigated in respect to what others must endure, and 'they shall be beaten but with few stripes.'

This general determination agrees with a more particular one to be found in the chapter before the text: 'Wo unto thee, Chorazin! wo unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works had been done in Tyre and Sidon which have been done in you, they had a great while ago repented in sackcloth and ashes. But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you:' Luke x. 13, 14.

Tyre and Sidon were cities distinguished in the Jewish prophets for their great abominations and iniquities; and the Jews, it is likely, thought that it would fare worse with none at the day of judgment than with those cities. But our Saviour tells them it should fare worse with the cities which had seen his mighty wonders, and yet refused to repent at his call. Which judgment of his was far from justifying or excusing the iniquities of Tyre and Sidon, or giving any promise of impunity to their sins: it supposes them to be reserved to great judgments, and threatens still severer punishment to those who under greater advantages were equal sinners.

Consider now the world as divided into two parts; one whereof has had the oracles of God committed to them, and enjoyed the light and direction of his word; and the other has been left to the guidance of mere reason and nature, and that knowlege of good and evil to which no rational creature can be an utter stranger; and you may, from the maxim of the text, learn these general truths with respect to each sort and condition of men:

First, that no man shall be judged by a law of which he had no knowlege, but every man shall stand or fall by the light that was given him; it being true of every moral action, what St. Paul has affirmed of alms-giving, 'It shall be accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.'

Secondly, that immoral actions admit of no excuse, but will subject every man to the judgment of God. For morality not being founded primarily on the authority of revelation, but on that reason which is a common gift to mankind, every man must answer for the use of his own reason: and where reason shows him the difference of good and evil, if he chooses the evil he is without excuse. There is no justification, no excuse, to be offered for sin in this case: it is in vain to plead passion or temptation, for reason was given for this very purpose to govern passion: and the submitting to passion and temptation against the light of reason, is the very depravity and corruption of heart that calls for vengeance; and therefore to plead passion as an excuse for acting against your reason, is to plead your own iniquity as a reason why you should not be punished. The rule laid down by St. James is decisive in this point, 'To him that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is sin.'

It may be said perhaps, that the notions of morality differ in different places; and that, through the power and force of custom and education, the things which appear to some to be worthy of stripes, appear to others in another light, and to have nothing criminal in them. Be it so: for I mean not to contest this piece of history at present. But yet, I say, this avails not in the present argument, nor affords any advantage to them who seek to excuse iniquity by pleading passion and infirmity. Where there is no consciousness of sin, there is no room to look out for excuses: and therefore whatever allowance may be made to those who, in such unhappy circumstances, sin without knowlege: yet certain it is, that all who contrive excuses for themselves can have no advantage of this circumstance; for the very making an excuse shows the consciousness of sin, and is a conviction that you have in your own opinion committed things worthy of stripes. How foolish a thing then is it to lose the

prospect of pardon, by deceiving yourself into an opinion that you do not want one! Such sins may be forgiven through repentance, but no art, no wit of man, will ever justify him.

Thirdly, it appears from this determination made by our blessed Saviour, that all who know the will of God, and live under the light of his gospel, shall, whether they like it or whether they like it not, be finally judged according to the gospel. The rule is peremptory; 'All who know the will of their Lord, and prepare not themselves, nor do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes.' Men act sometimes as if they thought it were in their own power to choose what law they would be judged by. As soon as they profess natural religion, they look on themselves to have no farther concern with the gospel, but seem satisfied that they shall be judged by their own notions. But if the gospel of Christ be indeed, as indeed it is, the will of God, it will not be so easily parted with. It is the law of our great Master, and obey it we must. The advice of a friend we may use or refuse, as we think fit; but the laws of our superiors must be obeyed. True, you will say, supposing it to be the law of our superior; but that is the very thing which you cannot admit. Look well to it, that this persuasion be not your crime: the people of Chorazin and Bethsaida did not believe in Christ Jesus; yet the evidence placed before their eyes was such, that their disbelief was the very circumstance which rendered their case more deplorable than that of Tyre and Sidon. The people of Jerusalem were also unbelievers; yet such was their unbelief, that at last the things which made for their peace were hid from their eyes. Here then is your case: you have the gospel of Christ Jesus before you; it claims your obedience on no slight credentials; it was introduced by greater works than ever man did; it was sealed with the blood of its great Author, and has been handed down to you by those who sacrificed all that was dear to them in the world in confirmation of its truth. Think not then that it can be an indifferent matter whether you receive or reject this law; or that it matters not by what light you walk, since you expect so much equity from God that he will judge you according to the light you have: for if the gospel be the law of God offered to

you, as it certainly is, and you are in the number of those 'unto whom much was given; of you therefore shall much be required.'

The mercy of God offered to you in the gospel through Christ Jesus is a call to repentance from dead works: it is a summons to you to turn to the living God in works of righteousness and holiness. When John the Baptist gave notice of the near approach of our blessed Lord, the sum of his doctrine was, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Our Saviour and his disciples introduce the gospel with the same warning; and St. Paul teaches that God, who winked at the times of ignorance, now, under the gospel, 'calleth all men every where to repentance; and hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness.' If then the great promises made through Christ Jesus belong only to penitents, who forsake sin and turn to God in newness of heart, how sadly do men impose on themselves who trust to be saved by God's mercy, without doing the work of God, and continue in sin in hopes that grace may abound! Little do they consider that those false presumptuous hopes will prove in the end great and real aggravations of their iniquity. To sin in hopes of mercy, is abusing the mercy of God, and making the goodness of our heavenly Father a reason for disobeying him. To plead the death or merits of Christ in excuse or in justification of iniquity, will so little avail, that it will amount to a condemnation out of our own mouths. 'Christ died to destroy the works of the devil, to redeem us from sin, to sanctify an elect people to God;' every Christian knows this, or may know it, if he looks into his Bible. Consider now what the plea in excuse for sin amounts to: in the mouth of a Christian it must come to this; I know that Christ died to destroy sin, but I will keep my sins and trust in his death: I know that the promises of God are made to those only who forsake their evil deeds; but I will depend on his promises for the pardon of my evil deeds, though I forsake them not. These are the persons, who, by abusing Christ and his redemption, do put him to open shame in the world, and, in the language of the Apostle, 'do crucify to themselves afresh the Son of God.' Happy had it been for such men had they been born in the darkest corners of the earth, to which the glad

tidings of the gospel never came: then they might have pleaded ignorance, and weakness, and want of the knowlege of God's will; but now they live, and act, and reason like heathens in the noon-day light of the gospel. And what can be the consequence of such a life, and such a knowlege, but this only, 'that they shall be beaten with many stripes?'

As to ourselves, we have great reason to bless God daily, that by his good providence we have been born and educated in a Christian country; that we have been admitted into the church of his blessed Son, and have had betimes the means of knowlege and of grace communicated to us: but let us take heed that we do not turn these blessings into curses on ourselves by our abusing them. These are great talents which our blessed Lord has entrusted us with if we use them as we ought: if we improve them to the glory of God, and the good of them about us, happy will it be for us, and we shall one day hear that blessed sentence, 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.' But if we neglect these great opportunities of salvation which God now affords, they will one day rise up in judgment against us, and condemn us. And it shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in that day, than for wicked Christians who were redeemed by the cross of Christ, but who accounted the blood of the covenant a vain thing; who were sanctified by the Holy Ghost, but did despite to the Spirit of God; who were bought with a price to be the servants of God, but who sold themselves for slaves to iniquity.

Lay hold therefore, my brethren, of the mercy of God, while the day of mercy lasts; for if you neglect or despise the goodness of God, which calleth us to repentance, this will be your condemnation, that 'light is come into the world, and you chose darkness rather than light.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXI.

LUKE, CHAP. IV.—VERSES 1, 2.

SHOULD we be asked (as the Apostles asked our Saviour the meaning of his washing their feet, which is related by St. John, xiii. 12—17.) the reason of what is related in this text, our answer is, *he hath given us an example that we should do as he hath done.* Even with good men who complain of the dangers which beset them, and that their prayers bring no blessing with them, we might expostulate, in the name and words of our Saviour, *if I your Lord and Master* have been tempted in all things like unto you, whence come your complaints? To profit by these things which are written for our instruction, we should keep from nice questions; we should not pry into the secret methods of God's providence, since the gospel contains sufficient inducement for us to admire his wisdom and goodness. In the case before us we want not matter of this kind: for the flattering hopes by which the tempter allured our first parents to disobedience, that they should be as gods, have been realised by means of our Saviour: this topic fully explained: here then we behold the wisdom and the goodness of God: by man came death, by man came also the plenteousness of redemption. Thus with respect to God, this temptation affords an ample subject of praise and glory; with respect to ourselves, it instructs us regarding our spiritual warfare, and supports us under it. All the tempter's art without doubt was displayed against our Saviour: hence we may learn the dangers through which we must pass in our way to happiness, and secure ourselves against the surprises which are so

often fatal to heedless unguarded innocence: here also we may learn from the best example how to make the best defence.

The lessons of Christian prudence and fortitude which are to be learned from our Saviour's conduct under the different trials being omitted, the circumstances of the temptation are considered, as recorded in the text, which relates that, immediately after his baptism, he was led to be tempted, *being full of the Holy Ghost*. We see the power of baptism and its blessings, to which all are entitled who partake of the baptism of Christ; for he was neither born nor baptised for his own sake, but that we might become, through faith, heirs together with him of the promises of God. The spiritual advantages of baptism enumerated, affording us great privileges and room for vast expectations: yet how unsuitable to these claims do the circumstances of a Christian's life often appear! This point enlarged on in the matter of a Christian's pilgrimage through life; who, though he boasts of more than human strength, yet sometimes sinks even below the character and dignity of a man. Thus the promises of God become of none effect; baptism sinks into a mere outward ceremony, which can no longer reach to the purifying the heart and mind; and hence the enemies of the gospel take occasion to blaspheme and ridicule the grace of God, as being nothing real. On the other side, it is certain that these prejudices have arisen from the mistaken notions of men concerning the grace of God: for having promised to themselves more than ever God promised, and finding grace to be not what they hoped it was, they rashly conclude that it is nothing; and argue against the truth of God's promises, from the vanity and delusion of their own. The absurdity of expecting the grace of God to ward off temptations without our own care, shown from human warfare. The Christian is called to the proof and exercise of his virtue, armed with the graces of the spirit, given him purposely by God; which, had there been no enemy to fear, he had not needed; having enough of his own to sit still

and do nothing: but assistance is given us according to our dangers, and *to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.* From these premises two deductions are made: I. that the temptations which good men have to struggle with, are no proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that his favor and kindness is in any degree lessened towards them: II. that the sins which Christians fall into and continue in, are no proof that they had not the Spirit, and grace sufficient to have preserved their innocence. These two cases considered: the dread of the first is that bitter root whence the misery of good men mostly springs, who are apt to imagine that, had they the Spirit of God, the wicked one would not dare to approach them; or if he did, that they should soon be able to quench his fiery darts: but when the temptation, though often repulsed, still renews its assault with redoubled force, then, through their own fear that they are deserted by the Spirit of God and given up to destruction, they lose the power of vigorous opposition, and become an easy prey to the invader: our first care then must be, rightly to apprehend our own condition, and the dangers or difficulties we are to meet with, that we may be able to stand, collected both in courage and counsel, for a just defence, like the Author of our Salvation: hence we may learn that our temptations, so far from being a proof that we want the Spirit of God, are rather a proof to the contrary, and that he will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear: our Saviour was not tempted till he had received the Spirit. The circumstances of the temptation fully drawn out. Having read these, shall we complain that every day brings its trial, and every night its temptation? shall we fear that God has given us up to anguish and despair in this world, and to inevitable ruin in the next? Ought not each of us, remembering that Christ has led the way, say with the Holy Psalmist, *it is mine own infirmity?* There is more reason to suspect ourselves, and to fear concerning the love of God, when all things are calm

and serene about us, when our body is free from pain, and our mind from care; then should we fear the enemy, when he thinks himself secure of us by leaving us alone in prosperity, the greatest of his temptations: hence the necessity to us who are prosperous, constantly exercising ourselves in the virtues proper to our station; if we see others led to virtue through hardships and poverty, we can only attain to this through charity and humility: if God has called others to defend their virtue against the assaults of vice, we, who enjoy a free and unmolested virtue, must take care that prosperity be not our ruin: if others are obliged constantly to be on their guard, and have work enough to secure an unblemished innocence, we who are in the securest recesses of our Lord's vineyard, having no dangers to molest our peace, must zealously labor to till and improve the soil, that we may give a good account of the talent committed to us. Secondly, from our Lord's temptation it appears that trials and temptations may be great and severe, where the gifts of the Spirit are administered in the largest proportion; and since those who are tempted may fall, (for otherwise temptations would be no trials,) it appears that grace may be sufficient; yet men may fall through the want of care and diligence on their own part. Our natural infirmities therefore, and a want of God's grace, is a false comfort and no excuse; for God suffers none to be tempted beyond what they are able to bear. The instruction to be learnt from these things, if we are so unhappy as to offend, is not to try to palliate our offences, or to charge God foolishly, but to labor, through a timely repentance, to correct what is done amiss, and thus return to our duty: God causes us to be tempted as a proof and trial of our virtue; and if we offend, the only remedy is repentance through faith in Christ Jesus; which coming from a sincere heart will never be rejected.

DISCOURSE XXI.

LUKE, CHAP. IV.—VERSES 1, 2.

And Jesus being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil.

AFTER our Saviour had washed his disciples' feet, and wiped them with a towel, 'he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?' None answering this question, he explained to them himself the meaning of what he had done: 'Ye call me,' says he, 'Master, and Lord; and ye say well: for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent, greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.' Should you ask the like question concerning the history in the text, our Saviour's temptation in the wilderness, and say, what is this that has been done unto him? how came the Son of God to be thus insulted by the powers of darkness? whence arose the tempter's confidence and power? or why were consummate virtue and innocence submitted to this proof and trial? you might be answered in like manner also, 'He hath given us an example, that we should do as he hath done.' Were you to hear the complaints, which even good men often make, that they are forced to struggle with many and with great temptations; that the paths of virtue are slippery and insecure, beset with many dangers; and that their prayers to be delivered from their trials come empty back, and bring no blessing with them; you might in our Saviour's name and in his words expostulate the case with them: 'Ye call me Lord and Master: and ye say well;

for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master,' have been perfected through trials, and in all things tempted even like unto you, whence come your complaints? whence is it said that you expect to be exempted from that condition to which I willingly submitted? 'The servant is not greater than his Lord, neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him.' I have led the way, and shown you how to conquer: and 'if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them.'

Since these things therefore are written for our instruction and admonition, the properest use we can make of them is to consider them in that view, and to keep at a distance from such nice questions as no man enters into with discretion, or gets out of with advantage. There is room in all the parts of the gospel dispensation to admire and adore the wisdom and the goodness of God, if that will content us, without prying into the secret methods of his providence. In this case now before us we want not matter of this kind: when the tempter allured our first parents to disobedience with the flattering hopes that they should be as gods, little did the blind prophet think that the day should ever come when the Son of God would appear in the likeness of man, to take vengeance of his bold attempt, to destroy his works, and to redeem the captives into the glorious liberty even of the sons of God: little did he imagine that man, who fell by aspiring to be like God, should ever indeed be so like him, as to be superior to all his arts and temptations, and be able to drive him from the dominion he had usurped over the creation. And yet behold the wisdom and the goodness of God! By man came death, and by man came the plenteousness of redemption: the first fruits of which we see in this victory over the tempter.

Thus with respect to God does this temptation afford an ample subject of praise and glory: but considered with respect to ourselves, it will yield us the greatest comfort and consolation to support us in our spiritual warfare, and the best instruction how to behave ourselves in it. There is no doubt to be made but that all the tempter's art was displayed against our Saviour: here then we may learn the worst we have to fear, and see the dangers we have to pass, in our way to happiness, and secure ourselves against the surprises which are often fatal

to heedless unguarded innocence: here too we may learn from the best example, how to make the best defence against the different temptations we stand exposed to; how manfully to maintain the combat, and to resist the fiery darts of the devil.

These lessons of Christian prudence and fortitude are to be learnt from our Saviour's conduct and behavior under the different trials the tempter made of him: but I propose at this time to consider the circumstances which attended this temptation, and are recorded by the Evangelist in my text: 'And Jesus, being full of the Holy Ghost, returned from Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being forty days tempted of the devil.' Now this temptation, we see, succeeded immediately to his baptism, in which the Spirit visibly descended on him; and God declared him, in a voice from heaven, to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased. And accordingly the text expressly tells us that he was led to be tempted, 'being full of the Holy Ghost.'

You see the power of baptism, and the blessings that are annexed to it, to which all are entitled who partake in the baptism of Christ: for himself he was neither born nor baptized, but for our sakes, that the blessings of both might descend on us, who through faith are heirs together with him of the promises of God.

By baptism the gates of heaven are set open to us, and the way paved for our return to our native country: by baptism we are declared to be such sons of God in whom he will delight, and whom he will appoint to be heirs of his kingdom: by baptism we receive the promise of the Spirit, by which we cry, Abba, Father.

Are not these great privileges? And is not here room for mighty expectations? And yet how unsuitable to these claims do the circumstances of a Christian's life often appear! He is on the road to heaven, you say, and the gates stand open to receive him; but how does he stumble and fall like other men, and sometimes lose his way, and wander long, bewildered in night and darkness! or if he keeps the road, how lazily does he travel, as if he were unwilling to come to his journey's end, and afraid to see the country which he is going to possess! The Christian only of all men pretends to supernatural power

and strength, and an intimate acquaintance with the Spirit of God: and yet how hardly does he escape the pollutions of the world, and how often look back with languishing eyes on the pleasures, riches, and honors of this life! And though he boasts of more than human strength, yet how does he sometimes sink below the character and dignity even of a man! Ye sons of God, for such ye say ye are, how do you die like the children of men, and how like is your end to theirs!

And what must we say of these things? Is the promise of God become of none effect? Is baptism sunk into mere outward ceremony, and can no longer reach to the purifying the heart and mind? The fact must not be disputed: it is too evident, at least in these our days, that the lives of Christians do not answer to the manifold gifts and graces bestowed on them: and it is as true that this has given great occasion to the enemies of the gospel to blaspheme, to ridicule the grace of God, which seems to them to be no real, no useful gift or power. But then it is certain, on the other side, that these prejudices have arisen from the mistaken notions which men have entertained concerning the grace of God: their expectations have been groundless and unwarrantable: they have promised themselves more than ever God promised them; and then finding that grace is not what they expected and hoped it was, they rashly conclude that it is nothing; and argue against the truth of God's promises merely from the vanity and delusion of their own. If you expect that the grace of God should ward off all temptations from you, or rescue you from the power and influence of them, notwithstanding your own remissness and want of care; as well may you expect that swords and pistols should fight your battles, subdue your enemies, and conquer countries for you, whilst your soldiers lie dissolved in ease and luxury, and forget to use their arms. The graces of the Spirit are the arms of a Christian, with which he is to enter the lists against the powers of darkness; and are a certain indication to us that God intends to call us to the proof and exercise of our virtue: why else does he give us this additional strength? We had strength enough of our own to sit still and do nothing: had it been his intention to remove us out of the way of temptation, and to place us out of danger, our weakness and our security

might well have stood together; and having no enemy to fear, we should not have been in need of so powerful an ally as the Spirit of God. But since our dangers are great, and even necessary to the trial of our faith and patient continuance in well-doing, therefore are we supported and encouraged by the assistance of God, 'to fight the good fight,' and 'to endure hardness as good soldiers of Jesus Christ.' To this we are called by the example of our Lord and Master, who, being full of the 'Holy Ghost,' was led by the Spirit 'to be tempted:' and this plainly intimates to us that the more abundant grace we receive, the more reason we have to expect trials and temptations; and 'that to whom much is given, of him shall much be required.'

And if this be the case, as most certainly it is, we may, I think, as necessary consequences, deduce these two things:

First, that the temptations which good men are exposed to, and often are forced to struggle hard with, are no proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that his favor and kindness are in any degree lessened toward them.

Secondly, that the sins which Christians fall into, and continue in, are no proof that they had not the Spirit, and grace sufficient to have preserved their innocence.

Let us consider these two cases. The temptations which good men are exposed to, and are forced often to struggle hard with, are no proof that they want the Spirit of God, or that his favor and kindness are in any degree lessened toward them. And yet the dread of this is but too common an ingredient in the temptations which good men suffer under: it is that which always lies at bottom where there are any symptoms of despair; and when an honest soul is harassed with doubts and misgivings of mind, and persecuted with dismal thoughts and fears, both of what is present, and what is to come, it is from this bitter root, generally speaking, that all the misery springs. Men are apt to imagine, that had they the Spirit of God, the wicked one would either not dare to approach them, or if he did, that they should soon be able to quench his fiery darts, and to command him with authority to get behind their backs. But when the temptation grows on them, and though often repulsed, yet as often with redoubled force renews the assault, then they begin to suspect themselves, to fear lest they are given up to destruc-

tion, and deserted by the Spirit of God. And when these fears possess the heart, like spies and traitors got within the town, they betray the strength of it to the enemy; they stifle all the generous thoughts of vigorous opposition, and leave the heart, thus bereaved of courage and constancy, and fidelity to itself, an easy prey to the invader.

The first thing then necessary in our spiritual warfare, is rightly to apprehend our own condition, and the dangers and difficulties we are to meet with; that when they come, we may be under no surprise, but may be able to stand firm, and collected both in courage and in counsel, to make our just defence. And for this purpose did the Author and Captain of our salvation leave us his example, that it might serve equally for our instruction and imitation. And hence we may learn that our temptations are so far from being a proof that we want the Spirit of God, that they are rather a proof of the contrary: 'God is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able to bear.' And therefore, if he suffers our temptations to be great, he will administer strength great in proportion. For the first part of our Saviour's life, we read of no temptations that befel him; but no sooner did he receive the Spirit, but he was led to be tempted. And how did it fare with him? He still conquered, and yet still was pursued. The tempter, though baffled, gave not over, but addressed to him with new art and cunning, in hopes still to prevail. Full forty days was he under trial, sifted in every part, exposed to the horrors of the desert, to the necessity of hunger: but neither the necessity of hunger, nor the horrors of darkness, nor the forty days' temptation, could move him from his steadfast confidence and trust in God. And who was it, I beseech you, that was left thus exposed to these cruel trials and temptations? Was it not he whom God but just before had by a voice from heaven declared 'to be his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased?' And can you still think that your temptations are any signs that God has forsaken you? that he has at once withdrawn his Spirit and his love from you? Can you think the continuance of your temptations any just ground for despair, when Christ himself was tempted forty days? For forty days without intermission was he tempted: how soon the temptation was again renewed,

how frequent or how long the returns of it were, we cannot tell: but that the tempter still pursued him, and watched all the seasons and opportunities of approaching him with advantage, is plainly intimated by the Evangelist, in the thirteenth verse of this chapter; 'And when the devil had ended all the temptation, he departed from him for a season.' He departed; but like an enemy that is rather enraged than subdued by his overthrow, he departed with resolutions to try his fortune again, and in his flight he meditated his return. Go, now, and complain that your life is full of anxious care and trouble, that every day brings its trial with it, and every night its temptation; and much you fear that God has withdrawn his Holy Spirit from you, and no longer regards you with the watchful eye of a tender father, but has given you up to uncertain fears, to anguish and despair in this world, and to ruin inevitable in the next: but when you remember that through all these dangers and difficulties Christ has led the way, that he, like you, nay more than you, was tempted and exposed, you must blush at your complaints, and with confusion of face confess that you have charged God foolishly, and with the holy Psalmist say, 'It is mine own infirmity.'

Whatever you may think, there is more reason to suspect yourself, and even to fear concerning the love of God, when all things are calm and serene about you, and when you stand as it were exempted from the common burden of life, your body free from pain, and your mind from care. One would be apt to suspect that the enemy of mankind thought himself secure of you, and that there wanted no trials and temptations to urge on your approaching ruin: else why should he neglect you only, whilst with the greatest diligence and application he is exercising with tortures both bodily and spiritual all the rest of the sons of God? The best and the only thing we can say to this is, that prosperity itself is the greatest of temptations, and the severest trial of virtue and innocence; and that the tempter leaves men to sink under the charms of plenty and indolence, as the surest method he can make use of. And if this be so, I am sure our ease and our plenty call on us for the utmost diligence and care, for the constant exercise of all those virtues that are proper to our station. If we see others led to virtue by

hardships and poverty, let us reflect that we want those tutors and guides, and that instead of them we have only charity and humility to follow: by the exercise of these we may reap the fruit of the others, and at last be found in the number of those who mourned with those who mourned.

If others struggle with temptations of divers kinds, and are perfected with trials, whilst we enjoy an inward peace and rest of soul, let us remember that we want the advantages they have. And since God has not called us to resist evil, as he has called others, he certainly expects that we should do more good: it is their business to defend their virtue against the assaults of vice; but we, who enjoy a free and unmolested virtue, must improve it in a constant exercise and discharge of all the duties of piety and religion, in keeping a strict hand over our passions, that prosperity be not our ruin. If others are forced to stand constantly on their guard, and to watch against the encroachments of vice, and have work enough to secure an unblemished innocence; we who are placed in the inmost and securest recesses of the Lord's vineyard, where no dangers can approach to molest and disturb our peace; we, I say, ought to labor the more zealously to till and improve the soil, that we may be able at the last to render a good account of the talent committed to our use.

Secondly, it appears from the circumstances of this history of our Lord's temptation, that trials and temptations may be great and severe, where the gifts and graces of the Spirit are administered in the largest proportion: and since those who are tempted may fall, for otherwise temptations would be no trials, it appears that those who have the gifts of the Spirit, and grace sufficient, may nevertheless fall into sin through the power of temptations, and the want of care and diligence on their own part. It is a false comfort, therefore, which sinners administer to themselves, when they excuse their sins by laying all the blame on their own natural infirmities, and the want of God's grace to enable them to do well. God is never wanting to those who are not wanting to themselves; and though he suffers all to be tempted, yet it is with this restriction on the tempter, that he tempt them not above what they are able to bear. The instruction which I propose to you from this

consideration is this, that whenever you are so unhappy as to offend, you do not try to palliate and excuse your offences, and charge God foolishly, as if he had been wanting to your assistance; but that you rather consider your own iniquity as your own, and instead of excusing your sins, and administering thereby a false comfort to your soul, you labor through a timely repentance to correct and amend what is amiss, and endeavor to regain the true peace of mind, by reconciling yourselves to God, and by a speedy and resolute return to your duty.

In a word, it is no man's fault that he is tempted; it is the condition of our spiritual warfare; it is the combat to which God calls us for the proof and trial of our virtue. Then only are we guilty, when we give way to temptations, and forsake God to follow the pleasures or the gains of wickedness. And whenever this is the case, there is but one remedy, repentance through faith in Christ Jesus, which will never be refused when it comes from a sincere heart, touched with a lively sense of God's goodness and its own unworthiness.*

* It is well observed in this Discourse, that 'since many things are written for our instruction and admonition, the properest use we can make of them is to consider them in that view, and to keep at a distance from such nice questions as no man enters into with discretion, or gets out of with advantage.' Why indeed should we pry curiously into the ways of Divine Providence, which are past finding out, and not rather accept the strong evidence which he vouchsafes to give us regarding facts, and at the same time profit by the instruction which they are intended to convey? Yet there still exists a school, even among ourselves, the disciples of which attempt to allegorise, or spiritualise, all the more abstruse parts of holy writ. To these persons the Temptation of Christ in the wilderness is peculiarly obnoxious: they cannot bring themselves to believe in the reality of the transactions recorded by the Evangelists, but turn the whole into a vision. Some have been led to this supposition by a consideration of the expression in the original text; that Jesus was led ἐν τῷ πνεύματι· i. e. 'in a vision:' not reflecting that ἐν τῷ πνεύματι is one of the commonest Hebraisms of the New Testament, for ὑπὸ τοῦ πνεύματος; and that this latter is the actual phrase made use of in the parallel passage of St. Mark iv. 1.

Others however stand on the mere suggestions of their own imagination, and affirm that the whole affair was a vision, because they cannot reconcile the facts to their own ideas of propriety. Such visionaries may be asked, what use they can assign to the transaction if it be thus spiritualised? For whether we suppose it took place for our instruction and example, or for the purpose which appears to be assigned in Heb. iv. 15. *for we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin;* it would lose all its effect if it were only a vision, and our Saviour not tempted at all.

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXII.

II CORINTHIANS, CHAP. VII.—VERSE 10.

RELIGIOUS and worldly sorrow compared in the text. The sorrow which arises from a sense of our iniquity is the cure as well as the consequence of the evil we suffer in worldly grief: sorrow shown to be a remedy worse than the disease, and to add weight to our misfortunes. The considerations of philosophy, which place wisdom in an absence of passion, and teach us to submit with indifference to the evils of life, not applicable to religion: in natural evils sorrow gives us the sharpest sense of our affliction, and leaves us enfeebled both in mind and body: but in spiritual evils religious sorrow produces and increases the means of our recovery, chases sin and guilt from the soul, and renders it capable of the expectation of future glory. It is shown to be the part of a friend to awaken in us a godly sorrow: example of St. Paul to the Corinthians: the blessed fruits of godly sorrow shown by the Apostle's words in the text. First, sorrow is distinguished from repentance, as it *worketh* repentance: secondly, sorrow worketh salvation by means of repentance: thirdly, worldly sorrow produceth death: fourthly, the death wrought by worldly sorrow, being opposed to the salvation which follows repentance, may signify eternal as well as temporal death: these observations explained and enlarged on. First, godly sorrow is said to work repentance, and is therefore distinguished from it; for if by repentance be understood sorrow for sin, we should say that godly sorrow produces sorrow for sin, i. e. godly sorrow produces *itself*: repentance therefore, denoting change

of mind, is the *effect* of godly sorrow, and the necessary condition of salvation: alliance between sorrow and repentance is explained, and the nature of sorrow in general considered. The cause of our sorrow must needs be the object of our aversion: cases shown where sorrow is a ridiculous passion. Worldly sorrow makes us in general feel our misfortunes, but does not enable us to redress them: this not the case in spiritual concerns, where sin is the object of our aversion, and the misery we suffer through vice the best guide to virtue. Secondly, godly sorrow not said to *work salvation* immediately, but by means of repentance; thus showing that a change of mind and life is necessary towards the obtaining God's mercy and forgiveness. A sense of guilt and misery leads us to the sorrow which produces repentance, and, by making us abhor our iniquities, produces that blessed change which is true repentance *unto salvation never to be repented of*. Fear may produce sorrow, but not always repentance; as in the case of Judas. The sorrow which does not bring forth repentance and reformation, is of no account in the sight of God. Godly sorrow is that which respects God; and this will always produce repentance, and be followed by salvation, in virtue of God's promises. Repentance unto life the greatest gift of God to a sinful world. Thirdly, a comparison is drawn between godly and worldly sorrow, showing the difference between them. Worldly sorrow is said immediately to *work death*: it brings forth nothing analogous to repentance: but confirms the evil disposition from which it flows: the causes from which worldly and godly sorrow arise being considered, the different effects which they produce are shown. Fourthly, the death which is wrought by worldly sorrow is opposed to the salvation which follows repentance, and may therefore signify eternal death. The natural effect of grief in general is to deaden the faculties, and render us useless to ourselves and others; but the effect of godly sorrow is to destroy itself, and leave the mind in ease and

tranquillity. Even in this life sorrow for sin produces the pleasures of righteousness, whilst the worldly man, pursuing false enjoyments, is ever reaping misery: in the world to come the tears of repentance will be wiped away; but the guilty tears of worldly sorrow will stand in judgment against us, and exclude us from the joys of heaven; as it is forcibly expressed in the words of the text, 'the sorrow of the world worketh death.'

DISCOURSE XXII.

II CORINTHIANS, CHAP. VII.—VERSE 10.

Godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

YOU have, in the words of the text, a character given you of religious sorrow, and the advantages of it set forth, and illustrated by a comparison between them and the evil effects of wordly sorrow. Sorrow in all cases arises from the conceit of misery either present or expected. When our sorrow grows from the consideration of our spiritual condition, from a sense of our own iniquity, and the pains of a guilty mind; from the fear of God's wrath and heavy judgments denounced against sinners; which are the proper objects of religious sorrow, and distinguish it from the grief of a worldly mind, which reaches only to the real or supposed evils of this life: in this case sorrow is not only the consequence of the evil we suffer or apprehend, but likewise its very cure and remedy. But in worldly grief, where men lament the loss of riches and honors, and vex their souls with the various disappointments of life, which are perpetual springs of uneasiness to all whose affections are wedded to the pleasures and enjoyment of the world; there sorrow is a remedy worse than the disease, and adds weight to our misfortunes, which, could they be neglected, would not be felt.

It is the glory of philosophy to raise men above the misfortunes of life, to teach them to look with indifference on the pleasures of the world, and to submit with manly courage and a steady mind to those calamities which no care can prevent, and which no concern can cure. Such are all the miseries

which are brought on us by a change of fortune, or the necessity of human condition. And the considerations of philosophy not extending beyond these limits, it is no wonder to find wisdom placed in an absence of passion; and grief and sorrow, and all the tender motions of the mind exposed as certain marks of a slavish abject spirit. But when the reasons of philosophy are transferred to the cause of religion, they lose their name; and the same conclusions, for want of the same principles to support them, are foolish and absurd. In natural evils, sorrow and grief of mind give us the quickest and sharpest sense of our afflictions, and divest us of the power of looking out for the proper comforts and supports: they increase and lengthen out our misery; nor can the mind ever lose sight of its afflictions, till length of time sets it free from grief, or the very excess of sorrow so far stupifies the sense of feeling, that it destroys itself. And when it leaves us, often it carries off with it our strength and health, and bequeaths to us a weak body and a feeble mind, and entails on the very best days of our youth the very worst infirmities of age and sickness: 'for the sorrow of the world worketh death.' But in spiritual evils, where sin and guilt threaten the life of the soul, and hasten to bring on us death eternal, sorrow is the best indication of life, and like the pulse in the natural body, shows there is some heat and vigor still remaining: as it increases, it brings with it the symptoms of recovery; sin and guilt fly before it; life and immortality follow after it. And the mind thus purged by religious sorrow sends into the heart fresh streams of pleasure, and abounds with all the joys which the sense of the love of God, the present possession of peace, and the firm expectation of future glory can produce: 'for godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of.' From the consideration of these different effects of worldly and of religious sorrow, the Apostle, with no less truth than art, insinuates to the Corinthians, how truly he had acted the part of a friend towards them, in bringing them to a due sense of sorrow for the sins they had committed. It is the part of a friend to ease our minds of grief, to step in between us and sorrow, and to make us, as far as it is possible, forget our misfortunes: why then do the ministers of Christ perpetually suggest new fears

to us, and still labor to awaken our souls to a sense of their misery, and to fill us with sorrow, by continually representing to us the greatness of our loss? To this let the Apostle answer for himself, and for all: 'I rejoice not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance.' If from worldly sorrow there can arise nothing but certain pain and misery, if the anguish of mind produces feebleness of body, and the lamenting our past misfortunes renders us incapable of the enjoyments which are present, happy is the man who can bear up against afflictions, and with an undisturbed mind submit to those evils which no sorrow can either ease or prevent. But if in godly sorrow the effects are just contrary, if grief can blot out the guilt of sins past, and preserve us from the infection for the time to come; if it brings ease to a wounded spirit, and makes us to be at peace with ourselves, and with God; if it renders life comfortable, and death not terrible; if it rids us of fear for the present, and fills us with hope full of future glory: how happy then are they who go to the house of mourning, and by a wise choice escape the punishment of sin, by submitting to the sorrow of it?

How these blessed fruits grow out of godly sorrow, will appear to you from the Apostle's words in the text, in which the effects of godly and worldly sorrow are fully expressed in few words: 'Godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of; but the sorrow of the world worketh death.' In which words you may observe, first, that sorrow is distinguished from repentance; for 'godly sorrow' is said to 'work repentance,' and is therefore supposed to have the same relation to it that the cause has to its effect. Secondly, you may observe that 'sorrow' is not said to 'work salvation' immediately and of itself, but by the means of that repentance which it produceth. Thirdly, you may observe that 'worldly sorrow is said to produce 'death' immediately: it brings forth nothing analogous to repentance, but does indeed confirm and strengthen the evil disposition from which it grows. Fourthly, the death which is wrought by worldly sorrow is opposed to the salvation which follows repentance; and may therefore signify eternal death, as well as temporal; the truth of the proposition admitting either or both of these explications. As I explain and

enlarge these observations, I shall take in what I judge necessary to give you a distinct conception of the nature of godly and of worldly sorrow, and to show the effects of both.

First, then, you may observe that sorrow is distinguished from repentance; for 'godly sorrow' is said to 'work repentance,' and is therefore supposed to bear the same relation to it as the cause does to its effect. In common speech we are apt to speak of sorrow for sin under the name of repentance, and to ascribe to it the effects belonging only to repentance: but the Apostle in the verse before us has plainly another notion of repentance, since the common notion would make an absurdity in the text; for if by repentance you understand sorrow for sin, the Apostle must then be understood to say that godly sorrow produces sorrow for sin; that is, that godly sorrow produces itself, since that only is godly sorrow which is on the account of sin. Repentance therefore is distinct from sorrow, and is wrought by it, and properly denotes a change of mind: which is indeed the natural effect of godly sorrow, and the necessary condition of salvation; and must therefore be the true and genuine explication of that repentance which stands in the middle between godly sorrow and salvation, as proceeding from one, and producing the other. And so distinct is this change of mind from sorrow, that of all its effects it is the happiest; ease and comfort attend on it, joy and hope flow from it. This is a change 'not to be repented of;' it can never cause us any grief or pain, or give us reason to lament any effect proceeding from it.

Sorrow then is not repentance, though it be the cause of repentance in most cases. The allianee between them will be best explained by considering the nature of sorrow in general, and the impressions it makes on every man's mind. Whatever is the cause of our sorrow must needs be the object of our aversion; since to take pleasure in the thing that grieves us and causes us pain, is a contradiction in nature. Many things occasion us sorrow which are out of the reach of our power, which come without our seeking, and go without our bidding. In all these cases sorrow is a useless passion, for the aversion arising from it brings torment without security; for to what purpose can our love or our concern serve, where the objects

are neither to be obtained nor avoided by our utmost care? Should we afflict ourselves with the thoughts of death, and raise in our minds the utmost horror and dread, yet death will move with the same pace to us, not retarded by our fears, or stopped by our aversion. And this shows how ridiculous a passion sorrow is in all these cases.

But where good and evil are set before us, and we are left to choose for ourselves, if through weakness or folly, or the prevailing power of any passion, we have chosen amiss, the pain we suffer from these evils of our own inviting is the best security for the future: we cannot lament the folly of our choice, without condemning ourselves for making it, and hating the thing which has brought so much sorrow along with it. This self-condemnation will teach us to correct our choice for the future, this aversion will turn the stream of our affections from the thing which brings so much misery with it. But this can extend but to very few instances of worldly concern, so little is there in our own power; for which reason worldly sorrow can only make us feel our misfortunes, without enabling us to redress them. But in spiritual concerns the case is otherwise: virtue and vice are placed within our choice; and we cannot do evil till we have first determined ourselves to do it; and, when we have done it, the sooner our minds recoil and grow sick of their unhappy choice, so much the better; since the correction of folly is often the parent of wisdom, and the misery we suffer through vice the best guide to the paths of virtue. Sin cannot be the cause of our sorrow, but it must likewise be the object of our aversion: the natural consequence of which is repentance, or a change of mind, by which we shall hate the vices we once delighted in, and fly to the arms of virtue, to taste those pleasures which experience has taught us are there only to be found. And thus you see how naturally a change of mind arises from godly sorrow, or sorrow for sin: which is a farther confirmation of the interpretation we have given of the Apostle's words.

Secondly, 'godly sorrow' is not said to 'work salvation' immediately and of itself, but by means of that 'repentance,' or change of mind, which it produceth.

This shows you that a change of mind, and consequently a

change of life, is absolutely necessary towards the obtaining the mercy and forgiveness of God; and that it is to little purpose to lament your sins, unless you resolve to forsake them. So many are the sad effects of sin, with respect to our health, our reputation, and our fortune in the world, which always suffer, and often sink, under the oppression of vice, that the sinner who has no fear of God before his eyes, has reason enough to be sorry for his sins. But sorrow arising from these motives is mere worldly sorrow: one laments the decay of his health, another the loss of his reputation, and a third the ruin of his fortune, and often one laments the loss of all: and equally they would have lamented these losses, had they come from any other cause besides sin. He that is sorry for his sin because it has destroyed his health, would have been as sorry had a fever destroyed it; he that grieves for the loss of his fortune, would have grieved in the same manner if fire or the rage of the sea had been his undoing. From whence it is plain that in such sorrow as this no regard is had to God, whom we are principally to respect in our repentance, as being the person against whom we have offended, and whose mercy and pardon we labor to obtain.

In true sorrow that produces repentance, the sense of our guilt is a great ingredient, as well as the sense of our misery. The very hopes we have of obtaining pardon at the hand of God will fill our minds with indignation against ourselves for having offended so gracious a master. For if we can think him good to forgive us, we must needs think ourselves wicked, and lost to all sense of gratitude and goodness, that we could offend so kind and compassionate a Lord. From this sense of guilt will arise indignation, and fear, and zeal; and every passion will be roused to act its part in making us hate and abhor ourselves and our iniquities, and will never let us be at peace with our own hearts, till we have purged them of every evil lust, and consecrated them anew to the service of our Maker. And this is that blessed change which is true repentance 'unto salvation never to be repented of.'

Fear may sometimes prevail against the power of lust, and the wretch who hates to think of God may not be able to exclude the fear and dread of him: when the flames of hell play

before the sinner's eyes, and guilt, conscious of its own deserts, fills the imagination with all the horrors of damnation; in this case there will never want sorrow, though perhaps there be no signs of repentance. Thus Judas grieved, in his grief he died, and in his death he found the pains of hell.

In the gospel there are no promises made to grief and sorrow: the mercies of God are offered on the condition of repentance; and though in the nature of the thing repentance must arise from sorrow, and therefore sorrow may be esteemed as a part of repentance; yet sorrow that produces not repentance, that is, a thorough change and reformation, is of no account in the sight of God. Such sorrow may be the sinner's due; if he suffers under it, he has but his reward; it is the just punishment of his iniquity, but can never be the condition of his pardon.

One would think this were too plain a case to be mistaken; yet so commonly it is mistaken, that repentance is grown almost into a form and method, and instead of reforming their sins, men set themselves so many days to be sorry for them. Alas! it is a fruitless grief they labor to affect themselves with; and they may assure themselves their hopes of pardon will be as empty and delusive as their sorrow. Were you truly sensible of your guilt, there would need no art to produce sorrow, you would want no rules to limit your grief by; nature would be your best instructor, and teach you to lament your misery and your guilt with unsought-for tears and groans: were you sincere, you would fly the viper that had stung you, and not cherish and caress the beast, whilst with false tears you bathe the wound you have received.

Godly sorrow is that which respects God. This sorrow will always produce repentance, and be followed by salvation, in virtue of the many promises of God, by which we are assured that, when the sinner is converted, and turns to the Lord, forsaking the evil of his ways, 'he shall save his soul alive.'

Repentance unto life is the gift of God to a sinful world, and the greatest that heaven ever bestowed on it: for though nature is no stranger to the grief and sorrow of repentance, yet is repentance our title to life through the gospel of Christ Jesus.

And therefore, when the Gentiles were admitted to be partakers of the gospel, and the news thereof was brought to the Apostles and brethren at Jerusalem, they bless God for his great goodness in having 'granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life.'

The nature of this godly sorrow we shall still better understand, by comparing it with worldly sorrow, and showing the difference between them.

Thirdly, then, you may observe that 'worldly sorrow' is said immediately to 'work death:' it brings forth nothing analogous to repentance, but does confirm and strengthen the evil disposition from which it grows.

There is such a connexion between the passions, that one cannot be powerfully set on work, but it must move and engage the others in their several spheres. Thus the Apostle, in the chapter of my text, tells us that the godly sorrow of the Corinthians produced fear and indignation, zeal and vehement desire, and revenge. And thus it must be: whatever afflicts us is the object of our hatred and fear; whatever we lament the loss of, that we must needs vehemently desire and long after; and our grief for the loss will rouse us to recover, if possible, the thing we lament for. This being agreed, you need only consider the causes from which worldly sorrow and godly arise, to see the workings of both, and the different effects which they must produce. The covetous man laments for the loss of his wealth, or regrets that his gains have been no larger: what must the consequence be? This grief will produce no change in him; covetous as he was before, his sorrow for his wealth will make him still more so: his industry to grow rich will be inflamed by his sorrow, his concern not to part with what is left will increase by his anxiety, and he will be ten times more a slave to the world than ever he was before. Consider the ambitious man's disappointment, and his sorrow that flows from it; the case will be still the same: how will his vexation urge him to repair his defeat, and make him perhaps divest himself intirely of all the regards to good and evil, virtue and vice, especially if he has once found them to stand in his way? Thus, you see, in all cases worldly sorrow confirms the

evil habits from which it grows, and is therefore the most direct way to death.

For the like reason godly sorrow will lead to life; for sin being the cause of sorrow, all the passions will be moved to dispossess it: hope and fear, and zeal, and vehement desire, will unite their force to throw out sin, which stands in the way of all their views. From whence must proceed an intire change of the man, and he that is heartily sorry for his sins will most certainly forsake them.

In godly sorrow we grieve for having enjoyed too much of the world, to the hazard of losing the more valuable pleasures of immortality: in worldly sorrow we lament our having had too little of the world. It is evident then that sorrow in one case will make us fly the world and its allurements; in the other it will render us but the more eager to pursue and overtake them. In one case, sorrow does as it were new make the man, gives him new desires and dispositions of mind, teaches him to shun the pleasures he once embraced with eager appetite, and to seek new joys and comforts which before he was a stranger to. In the other case, grief confirms the old habits, quickens the old desires, and makes a man ten times more worldly-minded than he was before; so that his last state is even worse than his first. And this will appear by considering, in the last place,

Fourthly, that the death which is wrought by worldly sorrow is opposed to the salvation which follows repentance, and may therefore signify eternal death as well as temporal, the truth of the proposition admitting either or both of these explications.

The natural effect of grief, considered as such, is to waste and impair the strength, to deaden the faculties of the mind, and to make a man useless to himself and his friends: so that where this passion inflamed to any degree has been long in possession, it leaves nothing of the man but the outward form, and hardly that. This, I say, is the effect of sorrow in general: but then here lies the difference between godly sorrow and worldly sorrow: the first, in every step, tends to peace and joy, and its most natural effect is to destroy itself, and leave the mind in perfect ease and tranquillity. The sinner's tears, though they

spring from grief, are yet the most sovereign cordial to an afflicted heart, and like showers in summer portend a cooler and more refreshing air. But worldly sorrow knows no rest, it has no period; it still urges men to new pursuits after the world, and the world has new disappointments in reserve to baffle all their eager care. Every disappointment is a new occasion of grief; and the whole gain of this passion for the world, being fairly computed, amounts to this, 'Vanity and vexation of spirit.' Thus the case stands if we regard only the comforts of this life. The sorrow for sin produces the pleasure of righteousness, which is a perpetual spring of joy and spiritual consolation: whilst the worldly man, pursuing false enjoyments, is ever reaping real torments. But if we change the scene, and look into the other world, the difference grows wider still: the time is coming when the tears of repentance shall be wiped away, when the sinner's grief shall stand between him and judgment, and the shame which he took to himself shall protect him from shame at the great appearance of the world. But worldly sorrow will then have a heavy account to pass; those guilty tears, which were shed for transitory pleasures of mortality, will stand in judgment against you, and exclude you from the joys of that life which is for evermore.

The confusion and distress of that time will be more than I can describe, or you imagine; they will exceed even the fears of guilt, and be more gloomy than even despair could ever paint them. The whole is comprised in the words of the text, 'the sorrow of the world worketh death.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXIII.

I PETER, CHAP. II.—VERSE 11.

PART I.

THE exhortation of the text so common in Scripture, that there is no need of many words to explain the subject. The Apostle therein points out the general source from whence impure vices arise, viz. from *fleshly lusts*: these are made, not to govern, but to serve the man: some are willing to call them *natural desires*; and then they ask, how is it so heinous an offence to comply with those desires, which God, for wise reasons, has made part of our nature? This might be asked with respect to brutes: but man must also ask, why was reason and understanding given to him? Does he act up to the dignity of his nature by following the example of the brutes, though they may fulfil the intent of their being? This point enlarged on.

It may be farther urged, why were these desires given, which are the cause of so much mischief, and iniquity, and of disturbance to the virtue even of the best men? In reply to this, we must consider, how far these desires are natural. The desires which are common, and therefore may be called natural, are such as are necessary to the preservation, first of individuals, next of the species: at the same time that we find these natural desires, we also discover the ends which nature has to serve by them; and reason thence discerns the true rule for the government of them. Our bodies cannot be supported without constant nourishment; hunger and thirst therefore are natural appetites, given as constant calls on us to administer this support:

ask any man of common sense how far they ought to be indulged; and he cannot help seeing that nature calls for no more than is proper for the health and preservation of the body, and that reason prescribes the same bounds: excess therefore in these appetites is not natural, but vicious, &c.: the craving of an habitual drunkard is not natural, but the effect of long practised intemperance; and such an appetite is a crime rather than an excuse.

In other instances of a like nature, they who have inflamed desires, commonly owe the excess of them to their own misconduct: there is a great difference between men of the same temper, where one shuns, and the other seeks temptation, &c.; and since the relish for sin often outlasts the temptation, this shows that there is in sensualists a greater corruption than can be charged on natural inclination.

Since then the desires of nature are in themselves innocent, and implanted in us for good ends; since God has given us reason to moderate and direct our passions, it is in vain to plead them in defence of sensuality, unless we could also plead that we are void of reason; for if it be the work of reason to keep the passions within due bounds, the reasonable creature must be accountable for the work of his passion: this exemplified in the case of human judicature. Such then being the case, what motives have we to guard against the irregularities of the passions? In the strong and earnest exhortation of the text two are offered to us: I. that we are *strangers and pilgrims:* II. that *fleshly lusts war against the soul.* On the first point, it is observed that St. Peter directs this epistle to the *strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia,* &c.; whence some have thought that the text was applied to them exclusively, on account of their dispersion on the earth: it is shown that there is no force in this observation. A more suitable meaning of the words may be found in the first chapter of this epistle, verse 17. and in Heb. xi. 13. The notion extends to all mankind, and shows

that the Apostle looked on all as strangers and pilgrims on the earth; consequently the exhortation concerns all alike, and reaches as far as the obligations of morality extend: and this consideration, placed in this view, has great weight, with respect to all who have faith enough to *desire a better, that is, a heavenly country*, &c.: this is putting all our hopes and fears with respect to futurity, in balance against the solicitations of sensual pleasure; this is appealing to our reason to show the absurdity of seizing momentary enjoyments, in a place where we have no permanent abode, at the hazard of forfeiting an everlasting inheritance. The subject enlarged on, and supported by various suppositions.

But why dwell on suppositions, when the truth of the case, fairly represented, will appear in a stronger light than any supposition can place it?

If we have immortal souls, and that we have nature herself declares within us, this place cannot be their native country: nothing immortal can belong to this globe, where all things tend to decay; and which itself shall one day be consumed. If this were the only place to which we have any relation, we then might justly complain of nature on account of the provision she has made for man, who alone of all creatures here below would want a happiness suited to his capacity: but if something more is in reserve for him, his desires are well suited to his condition: and God's wisdom is evident in his having given to man desires fitted for nobler enjoyments than this world affords, since for man much nobler enjoyments are prepared. This being the case, what has a wise man to do, but to get through this world as he can, that he may arrive at those everlasting pleasures which are in store for him? What can he think of the enjoyments of this world, but that they are below the care of one who is born to so great expectations? Thus he must think even with respect to innocent delights: they are frail and transient; he is immortal, &c.: but guilty pleasures

must appear to him in a far more ugly form: he is hastening to the place where his heart is fixed; they are robbers, which lie in wait on his road to intercept him; to take away his life and his treasure, &c.

Consider this case fairly, look to the glory and immortality placed before you, and then to the temptations which surround you in the world, to intercept your hopes; and then say, if there could be a more powerful argument to abstain from fleshly lusts than this, that ye are *strangers and pilgrims*, &c.?

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, say the disciples of Epicurus; whose exhortation is suitable to their principle. No inconsistency in exhorting men to make the best of this world, when you teach them that no other is to be expected: but absurd to support the same doctrine, without asserting the same principle. Suppose however this world to be only a state of trial, and that our appetites were given us partly for a proof of our virtue: the consequences of this admission considered.

But perhaps it may farther be asked, how is it consistent with God's goodness to work such temptations into the very nature of mankind? which comes in fact to this—How is it consistent with his goodness to make any thing which is not absolutely perfect; to make rational creatures, for instance, capable of doing amiss? This point enlarged on.

Conclusion: the desires of nature are ordained to serve the ends of nature: reason is given to man to govern the lower appetites and keep them within due bounds; in this consists the virtue of man; this the trial to which he is called; and the prize is nothing less than immortality.

PART II.

The exhortation in the text is enforced by two considerations, nearly allied to each other: that we are *strangers and*

pilgrims here on earth, and consequently have a better interest in another country which ought not to be neglected for the low gratifications of this: whoever allows the principle, must allow the consequence. This leads us to an inquiry worthy of all our pains, how far we may pursue the pleasures of this life, consistently with our hopes of a better: some enjoyments there are not below the care of a wise and good man in this world, both in the cultivation of the mind, and in the pleasures of sense properly restrained: but whenever our appetites are too strong for our reason, and carry us beyond the bounds of temperance to the injury of ourselves and others, then it is that our *fleshly lusts do war against the soul;* then we wound our own souls, and, for the sake of momentary pleasures, expose ourselves to eternal death. The express command of the gospel against drunkenness, fornication, and such vices, coming as it does from one who has power to execute his decrees, ought to be a sufficient argument to Christians: but the Apostle in the text goes farther, and lays before us the reason in which the command to *abstain from fleshly lusts* is founded: this point enlarged on. If we consider wherein the dignity of man consists, and what are his means to make himself happy, we shall see clearly the ill effects of sensual lusts: no need of abstracted speculations on the subject.

There is no man so little acquainted with himself, but that he sometimes finds a difference between the dictates of his reason, and the cravings of appetite: this discord is the foundation of the difference observable among men with regard to moral character and behavior: this point enlarged on. If our passions are to govern us, and reason only to furnish means and opportunities of gratifying them, it will be hard to account for the wisdom of God in making such a creature as man. If we have no higher purposes to serve than the brutes, why have we more understanding than they? but it would be well if we could say as much for some sensual men, as we can for the brutes, who

are ten times less mischievous, in having only appetites, without reason and the powers of contrivance, &c.

Hence it is evident in what manner sensual lusts do war against the soul, considered as the seat of reason and all the nobler faculties. If we look into past or present ages, we shall see numberless instances of the pernicious effects of passion, assisted by a corrupt and depraved reason: this point enlarged on.

But let us consider, that the only part of man capable of improvement is the soul: we can do little or nothing for the body; and if we could do more it would be little worth: if therefore we have any ambition of being better than we are, either in this world or in the next, we must cultivate the mind. The excellency of a rational creature consists in knowlege and virtue, one the foundation of the other: these are what we ought to labor for: but sensual lusts prohibit our improvement in either, and do therefore war against the soul.

As to knowlege, the best and most useful is the knowlege of ourselves, of the relation in which we stand to God and man, and of the duties thence arising. Now this knowlege is such an enemy to sensual lusts, that a sensual man will be much indisposed to receive it, because to him it is self-condemnation: hence the many prejudices in the world against the first principles of natural religion, and the many arguments to destroy the distinction between soul and body, and all hopes of a future state. If the fear of God be, as in truth it is, the beginning of wisdom, sensuality cuts us off from all hopes of improvement, as rational beings, by choking the spring from whence all wisdom flows: it ties us down to the world, materializes the soul, and makes it incapable of conceptions worthy of itself: this point enlarged on.

Secondly, virtue and morality are the distinguishing characters of rational beings; but these will always be lost where the appetites have dominion.

In all cases where our thoughts are confined to ourselves, and we aim only at our own interest and pleasure, we act on a principle destructive of morality: the ability we have of extending our views beyond ourselves, and considering what is fit, proper, and reasonable, with regard to others, is the foundation of morality: this subject extended, and various instances given, in which sensuality makes a man overlook what is due to others, and lose all regard for justice, equity, and compassion.

Hence it is plain that the virtue of a man consists in bounding his desires within the limits of reason and morality: these limits the *lusts of the flesh* are perpetually transgressing; every such transgression is a wound to the soul, which weakens its natural faculties, and renders it less able to discharge its proper office, &c. Hence arises another consideration, showing how effectually sensual lusts do war against the soul, by extinguishing natural conscience, and not leaving a man reason and religion enough to repent of his iniquities: for the mind grows sensual by degrees, loses all relish for serious thought and contemplation, and contracts a brutal courage that cares neither for God nor man: this point enlarged on. The sensual man has but one hope with respect to futurity, and a sad one it is, that he may die like the beasts that perish: but nature, reason, religion, deny him this comfort, and with one voice proclaim, *that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world.* The terrors of that day to sensualists and sinners described. Conclusion: a return to the argument: the sensual man's condition briefly reviewed: the sum of his account is, that he has his portion of enjoyment in this world with the brutes, and in the next his punishment with wicked spirits: this is the war which the lusts of the flesh wage against the soul: from such enemies a wise man ought to fly, for they have power *to cast both body and soul into hell.*

DISCOURSE XXIII.

I PETER, CHAP. II.—VERSE 11.

Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.

PART I.

THE exhortations of Scripture to abstain from fleshly lusts, or lusts of the flesh, are so many, the expression itself is so familiar to Christians, and so well understood, that there is no need, I think, of many words to explain the subject matter of the advice now before us. Some sins are privileged by their impurity from being exposed as they deserve: a modest tongue cannot relate, nor a modest ear receive an account, without great pain, of the various kinds of lewdness practised in the world; for as the Apostle to the Ephesians remarks, 'It is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.' Had he lived in our times, he might perhaps have varied his phrase, and said, 'which are done of them in public.' These impurities are, in one sense of the word, no longer 'works of darkness,' they appear at noon-day. Since therefore they no longer affect to be disguised, they will speak for themselves what they are: I have no mind to speak for them.

The Apostle in the text has pointed out to us the common source from whence vices of this kind proceed: they arise from 'fleshly lusts:' words which carry a reason in them, to all who value their reason, not to give themselves up to the dominion of appetites, made not to govern, but to serve the man. But reason, when it becomes a slave to vice, must do the drudgery of vice, and support its cause: and therefore, on this topic, vice has borrowed some assistance from reason, and made a show of arguing in its own defence. These 'fleshly lusts,' as

the Scripture calls them, others are willing to call natural desires; and then the question is asked, how it becomes so heinous an offence to comply with the desires which God, for wise reasons, has made to be part of the nature which he has given us? Were this question asked in behalf of the brute creatures, we would readily answer, we accuse them not; but when man asks it in his own behalf, he forgets that he has another question to answer before he can be intitled to ask this, for what purpose was reason and understanding given to man? Brutes have no higher rule to act by than these instincts and natural impressions; and therefore, in acting according to these, they act up to the dignity of the nature bestowed on them, and are blameless. But can you say the same of man? Does he act up to the dignity of his nature, when he makes that his rule which is common to him and the beasts: when he pursues the same inclinations, and with as little regard to virtue and morality? Why is man distinguished from the brute creatures by so superior a degree of reason and understanding, by a knowlege of moral good and evil, by a notion of God his Creator and Governor, by a certain expectation of judgment, arising from a sense of his being accountable, if, after all, there is but one rule of acting for him and for the beasts that perish? Let these desires be natural; yet tell me, does the addition of reason make no difference? Is a creature endowed with knowlege at liberty to indulge his desires with the same freedom as a creature that has no reason to restrain it? If this be absurd, it is to little purpose to plead that the desires are natural, since we have reason given us to direct them, and are not at liberty to do whatever appetite prompts us to do, but must in all things consider what is reasonable and fit for us to do: for surely there is no case in which a reasonable creature may renounce the direction of reason.

It will be farther urged, to what purpose were these desires given, which are apparently the cause of much mischief and iniquity in the world, and oftentimes a great disturbance to the best in a life of religion? In reply to this, it will be necessary to consider how far these desires are natural.

If we look into mankind, we shall find that the desires which are common, and therefore may be called natural, are

such as are necessary to the preservation of individuals, and such as are necessary for the preservation of the species. At the same time that we find these natural desires, we discover the ends which nature has to serve by them; and reason from thence discerns the true rule for the government and direction of them. Our bodies are so made, that they cannot be supported without constant nourishment: hunger and thirst therefore are natural appetites given us, to be constant calls to us to administer to the body the necessary supports of the animal life. Ask any man of common sense now, how far these appetites ought to be indulged; he cannot help seeing that nature calls for no more than is proper for the health and preservation of the body, and that reason prescribes the same bounds; and that when these appetites are made occasions of intemperance, an offence is committed against as well the order of nature, as the rule of reason. The excess therefore of these appetites is not natural, but vicious: the intemperate man is not called on by his natural appetites, but he does, in truth, call on them to assist his sensuality, and often loads them so hard that they recoil, and nauseate what is obtruded on them. An habitual drunkard may have, and has, I suppose, an uncommon craving on him; but the excess of his craving is not natural: it is not of God's making, but of his own, the effect of a long practised intemperance: and such an appetite will be so far from being an excuse that it is itself a crime.

In other instances of a like nature, they who have inflamed desires, commonly owe the excess of them to their own misconduct. There is a great deal of difference between men of the same temper, where one shuns, and where the other seeks the temptation; where one employs his wit to minister to his appetite, and the other uses his reason to subdue it: the passions of one, by being used to subjection, are taught to obey; the appetites of the other, knowing no restraint, take fire on every occasion; and the corrupted mind, instead of opposing, endeavors to heighten as well the temptation as the sin: and often it is seen that the relish for the sin outlasts the temptation: a plain evidence that there is a greater corruption in sensual men than can be charged on natural inclination.

Since therefore the desires of nature are in themselves inno-

cent, and ordained to serve good ends; since God has given us reason and understanding to moderate and direct our passions; it is in vain to plead our passion in defence or excuse of sensuality, unless at the same time we could plead that we were void of reason, and had no higher principle than passion to influence our actions: for if it be the work of reason to keep the passions within their proper bounds, the reasonable creature must be accountable for the work of his passion. And so the case is in human judicatures: anger and revenge, pride and ambition, are very headstrong passions, and the cause of great mischief in the world; but they cannot be alleged in excuse of the iniquity they produce, because the reason of the offender makes him liable to answer for the extravagance of his passion. Take away reason, and bring a madman or an ideot into judgment, and the magistrate has nothing to say to him, whatever his passions, or the effects of them, may be.

It is the work of reason then to preside over the passions: and seeing it is so, let us consider what great motives we have to guard against the irregularities of them. St. Peter is very earnest in the exhortation of the text, 'Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.' Here are two things offered to our consideration as motives:

First, that we are 'strangers and pilgrims,' and ought therefore to abstain from fleshly lusts.

Secondly, that 'fleshly lusts war against the soul,' and therefore we ought to abstain from them. I shall consider them in their order.

First, we are 'strangers and pilgrims,' and ought therefore to abstain from fleshly lusts.

St. Peter directs this epistle to the 'strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia;' which has led some to think that he applies to them in the text under the same notion, and calls them 'strangers and pilgrims' on account of their dispersion on the earth. But I see no force in the exhortation on this view. With respect to religion and morality, there is no more reason to abstain from vice in a foreign country than in your own. There may possibly be sometimes prudential reasons for so doing: but this is too

narrow, and too mean a consideration, for an Apostle of Christ to build so weighty an exhortation on it, as that of the text. We must look out therefore for a more proper meaning of these words, and more suitable to the occasion. And we need not look far for it: in the first chapter of this epistle, verse 17, St. Peter thus exhorts, 'If you call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here with fear.' It is plain that St. Peter here calls the time of life the time of our sojourning here; and consequently reckons us to be strangers and pilgrims as long as we are in this world. In the same sense the author to the Hebrews speaks of the saints of old, 'These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth:' Heb. xi. 13. This notion extends to all mankind, and shows that the Apostle looked on them all as strangers and pilgrims on the earth: consequently the exhortation founded on this notion extends to all alike, and reaches as far as the obligations of morality reach. And this consideration, placed in this view, has great weight in it, with respect to all who have faith enough to 'desire a better, that is, a heavenly country,' and to know themselves to be but only passengers through this world, and on their way to 'a city prepared for them.' This is putting all our hopes and fears, with respect to futurity, in balance against the solicitations of sensual pleasure; this is appealing to our reason, to show us how absurd it is to give ourselves up to momentary enjoyments in a place where we have no certain abode, at the hazard of forfeiting our right to that country where we have an inheritance which shall endure for ever. Wise travellers do not use so to entangle themselves in the affairs of foreign countries, as to cut off all hopes of a return to their own home: such especially as belong to a country in no respect to be rivalled by any other place, and are intitled to a large share of the wealth and honor of it; such, I say, will not suffer their thoughts and cares to be so engaged abroad as to forget their own inheritance, which waits to be enjoyed, and which, *once enjoyed*, will recompense all the fatigues and hazards *of the journey*. But this comparison conveys to our

minds but a faint image of the case before us: one country may differ from another, but no one differs so much from another, as to represent to us the difference between heaven and earth. Many are intitled to great degrees of honor and riches in their own countries; but no man is intitled to so much on earth as every man is intitled to in heaven, if he forfeits not his hopes by sacrificing them to the mean and low enjoyments of the world. Put the case, that a man was so framed by nature as to hold out a thousand years in his native air, and to be hourly in danger of death in foreign parts, and at best able to hold out but to sixty or eighty years at most: how eagerly would such a man press homewards, if ever he found himself in another country! How would he despise the strongest temptations of pleasure that should pretend to stay him but a day! How contemptible would all the honors and glories and riches of foreign kingdoms appear to him, when put in the balance against the secure and long life to be enjoyed at home! Add to this supposition one circumstance more, that the man is by nature made for the enjoyments which his own country only can afford, that all the pleasures elsewhere to be found are attended with pain and uneasiness in the pursuit, liable to many vexations and disappointments; the enjoyment of them turbulent and transient, the remembrance of them irksome and oftentimes tormenting; in this case what would a wise man do? Would he not reject with disdain such enjoyments as these, and call up all the strength of his mind, summon all the powers of reason to withstand temptations so destructive to his natural and real happiness?

But what need to dwell on suppositions, when the truth of our case, fairly represented, will appear in a stronger light than any supposition can place it?

If we have immortal souls, and that we have nature speaks within us, this place, we are sure, is not their native country: nothing immortal can belong to this globe, where all things tend to decay; which shall itself be one day consumed, and this beautiful order be succeeded by a new confusion and another chaos. Were this the only place to which we have relation, we might justly complain of nature for the sad provision she has made for man: he only, of all the creatures of this lower

world, wants a happiness suited to his capacity. The rest of the creatures seem satisfied and happy, to the full measure of their capacities, by the provision made for them. Man alone finds no true enjoyment here, but is ever restless, and in pursuit of something more than this world can give. If something more is in reserve for him, his desires are well suited to his condition, and the wisdom of God is discernible in giving man desires fitted for nobler enjoyments than this life affords, since for man much nobler enjoyments are prepared. These desires are given to be a constant call to him to remember the dignity of his creation, and to look forward to the better hopes of a better world; and to govern and restrain the appetites which, too freely indulged, set him on a level with the brutes, and disqualify him for the happiness proper to rational beings.

Taking this to be the case, what is it a wise man has to do, but to get as well through this world as he can; I had almost said as fast as he can, that he may arrive at those enjoyments in reserve for him, which will yield a full as well as an endless satisfaction? What can he think of the pleasures of this world, but that they are below the care of him who is born to so great expectations? Thus he must think even of innocent delights: they are frail, transitory, and uncertain; he is immortal: these therefore are but unworthy objects of his desires; fit to be used, but too mean to be courted; proper for his diversion, but never good enough to become his business, or to employ his thoughts in the pursuit of them. But guilty pleasures, the sensual enjoyments and pollutions of the world, appear to him in a more ugly form: he is on the way, hastening to the place where his heart is fixed: sensual pleasures are robbers which frequent his road, and lie in wait to take away his life and his treasure: these he will fly, for they are dangerous, and he has all his wealth about him; even his hopes and expectations of immortality, which die away if once he falls into the snares of sensuality.

Consider this case fairly, look to the glory and immortality which are placed before you, and the everlasting habitation prepared for those who serve their Maker in holiness, and keep themselves *unspotted from* the world: then view the temptations *which surround you*, which would fix you down to this

world, and intercept all your hopes; and tell me what more powerful argument there can be to abstain from fleshly lusts than this, that ye are strangers and pilgrims on earth, and look for another, even a heavenly habitation.

Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die, say the disciples of Epicurus: commendable in this, that their exhortation is suitable to their principle. There is no inconsistency in exhorting men to make the best of this world and the pleasures of it, when you teach them there is no other to be expected: but surely it is to the highest degree absurd to teach the same doctrine, without asserting the same principle. There is not common sense in saying, let us eat and drink, for after this life we shall enter on another without end. Yet this is the wise exhortation which every man makes, who pretends to believe a future state, and yet pleads for a liberty to indulge his appetites in this. Yes, say you; but God, who knows what he has prepared for us hereafter, has yet given these appetites: and how can it be so inconsistent with our future expectations to gratify our appetites at present, since our appetites as well as our expectations are natural, and both derived from the same original? This is the capitol of the cause, the darling argument of the sensual man. But suppose this world to be a state of trial, suppose these appetites to be given partly for the proof of our virtue, how will the consequence stand then? God has given us appetites for the trial of our virtue, therefore we may indulge our appetites without any regard to virtue: how? No man surely can reason thus: it can never follow that we are at liberty to sin, because God has thought fit to call us to a trial of our virtue. But if God has given us appetites, and made it part of our trial to govern and restrain them within the bounds of temperance and justice, and you will nevertheless infer, that because God has given these appetites, we may therefore indulge them to the utmost; what is it but making that a license to sin, which God and nature intended for a trial of virtue?

But you will insist farther perhaps, and ask how it is consistent with God's goodness to work such temptations as these into the very nature of mankind? A notable question! But if you attend to it, it comes to this: how is it consistent with God's goodness to make any thing that is not absolutely perfect,

to make rational creatures, for instance, capable of doing amiss? The question, I say, comes to this, or else there is nothing in it: for if God may make creatures not absolutely perfect, but capable of sinning, there is no greater objection against putting the trial of their virtue on their natural appetites, than on any other weakness or infirmity: and some infirmity there must be in every creature capable of offending, and thereby capable of a trial. Had we no desires that could incline us to do amiss, we should be above a state of trial: and if it is lawful to indulge all our desires on this pretence, that they are natural, it is evident we cannot do amiss in following our desires, and consequently we are not in a state of trial. What hitherto we have called temptations to sin, are in truth justifications of it; for temptations act on our desires, and our desires cannot lead us wrong: and if so, every base action is justified by the temptation that produces it: and no man can sin but when he is forced to do something against his inclination. This plea, drawn from natural desires, is, I know, made use of to justify one kind of wickedness particularly: but surely this is very partial dealing; for I see no reason why pride, ambition, and avarice should be excluded the benefit of it. Have pride, ambition, and avarice no desires? or are they all unnatural? It would be well for the world if they were, but the case is otherwise: mankind are of a nature subject to these desires as well as others; and on the foot of this plea we may make saints, as well as heroes, of all the great disturbers of the world.

To conclude: the desires of nature are ordained to serve the ends of nature: reason is given to man to govern the lower appetites, and to keep them within their proper bounds: in this consists the virtue of man: this is the trial to which he is called; and the prize contended for is nothing less than immortality. If we indulge ourselves to the utmost in this world, our enjoyments must be very short-lived, since we are ourselves but of a short continuance on earth; but the next scene that opens will present us with a state that never changes, either happy or miserable, according as we behave here. In this world we have little interest, no abiding place; and ought therefore to pass through it with the indifference of travellers, whose affec-

tions are placed on their native country. This is the view the Apostle had before him in giving the exhortation contained in the text, 'Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.'

DISCOURSE XXIII.

PART II.

THE Apostle in the text enforces his exhortation 'to abstain from fleshly lusts' by two considerations, which yet are near allied to each other. He calls on us to remember that we are strangers and pilgrims here on earth, and consequently that we have a better and a dearer interest in another country, which ought by no means to be neglected for the sake of the low and mean enjoyments which this world affords. Whoever allows the principle must needs allow the consequence. If we are related to two worlds, if this present be in all respects inconsiderable, compared to the other, no reason can justify or excuse us in sacrificing our interest in the other world to the allurements and temptations to be met with in this.

This being allowed, leads us to an inquiry worthy of all the pains we can bestow on it, how far we may pursue the pleasures of this life, consistently with our hopes and expectations of a better. Some enjoyments there are not below the care of a wise and good man in this world, though he forgets not that he is related to another: such are the pleasures of the mind, arising from the exercise of reason: such are, in a lower degree, the pleasures which our senses furnish, whilst used within the bounds of temperance, and so restrained as not to be prejudicial to ourselves and others. Whenever our appetites become so much too strong for our reason, as to carry us into offences in either of these respects, then it is that our 'fleshly lusts do war against the soul.' If we violate the laws of justice and equity, to make way for the gratification of our passions; or if we render ourselves incapable of discharging the duties of re-

ligion and morality, arising from the relation we bear to God and man, we wound our own souls, and, for the sake of momentary pleasures, expose ourselves to death eternal.

It ought to be a sufficient argument to Christians, to show them the express command of the gospel against drunkenness, fornication, adultery, and vices of the like nature: for since the command comes from him who has power to execute his decrees, and the penalty of them, on every offender; to transgress such injunctions so given must discover a want of faith, as well as a want of virtue. But the Apostle in the text goes farther, and exhorts us to 'abstain from fleshly lusts,' by laying before us the reason in which the command to abstain is founded: was there no difference between abstaining and not abstaining; was the man who gives a loose to his passions, and indulges them to the utmost, in as fair a way to happiness as he who governs and restrains them, and bounds them on every side by the rules of justice and equity; the command to abstain would be merely arbitrary, and void of any reason to support itself. But the case is not so: sensual enjoyments have a natural tendency to debase the mind, to render it incapable of discharging its proper functions, and unworthy of the happiness to which it is ordained; for 'fleshly lusts war against the soul:' for which reason we are commanded to abstain from them: for which reason we ought to abstain from them, though the command had not intervened.

If you consider wherein the dignity of man consists, and what are the means put into his hands to make himself happy, you will have a clear prospect of the ill effects of sensual lusts, and see how truly they war against the soul.

There is no occasion to carry you into any abstracted speculations on this subject; it will be sufficient to the purpose to make use of the observations which common sense will furnish.

There is no man so little acquainted with himself, but that he sometimes finds a difference between the dictates of his reason and the cravings of appetite; between the things which he would do, and the things which he knows he ought to do. This discord is the foundation of the difference to be observed among men with regard to their moral character and behavior. When *men* give themselves up to follow their appe-

tites, and have no higher aim than the gratification of their passions, all the use they have of their reason is to administer to their senses in contriving ways and means to satisfy them. Where this is the case, consider what a figure a man makes: he has appetites in common with the brute creatures, and is led by them as much as they; only the reason he has enables him to be more brutish than they, and to run into greater excesses of sensuality than mere natural appetites, without the help and assistance of reason to contrive for them, can arrive to.

If our passions are to govern us, and the office of reason is only to be subservient, and to furnish means and opportunities of gratifying the desires, it will be very hard to account for the wisdom of God in making such a creature as man. If we have no higher purposes to serve than the brute creatures, why have we more understanding than they? We see that they do not want more reason than they have to follow their appetites; they move regularly as they are moved, and pursue constantly the path marked out by nature. It would be well if we could say as much for some sensual men; but they are ten times more mischievous to the world, than they could possibly be, if they had only appetites and no reason: for appetites, unassisted by a power of contriving, could be guilty of no treachery, no breach of trust; of no schemes to overreach, defraud, and undo multitudes, and a thousand other wickednesses, which sensual worldly men are daily guilty of, and will be guilty of as long as their reason is employed to promote the ends of their passion. So that, considering the case with respect to this world only, the sensual man, who gives himself to be conducted by his appetites, is a more mischievous, a more odious creature, and a greater reproach to his Maker, than any of the brutes; which he may perhaps despise, but ought indeed to envy, for being irrational.

From hence it is evident in what manner sensual lusts do war against the soul, considered as the seat of reason, and all the nobler faculties; in the due use and improvement of which the dignity of man consists. If we look into the ages past, or into the present, we shall want no instances of the pernicious effects of passion, assisted by a corrupt and depraved reason.

The miseries which men bring on themselves and others are derived from this fountain; and these miseries, which we provide for ourselves and others, will be found, on a fair computation, to make nine parts out of ten of all the evil which the world feels and complains of. 'From whence come wars and fightings among you?' says St. James, 'come they not hence, even of your lusts, which war in your members?' He might have added to his catalogue many iniquities more, and repeated the same question and answer: for whence proceed jealousies, suspicions, the violations of friendship, the discord and ruin of private families? Whence come murder, violence, and oppression? Are these the works of reason given us by God? No, they are the works of sensuality, and of a reason made the slave of sensuality. Were all who are given to such works as these to be deprived of their reason, the world about them would be much happier, themselves more harmless, and, I think too, not less honorable. So effectually do sensual lusts war against the soul, that it would be better for the world, and not worse for the sensualist, if he had no soul at all.

But to be more particular. Let us consider that the only part of man, capable of any improvement, is the soul: it is little or nothing we can do for the body; and if we could do more, it would be little worth. We cannot add to our stature; and if we could, where would be the advantage? The affections, which have their seat in the body, can yield us no honor: they are capable of no improvement; the higher they rise, the more despicable we grow: they can yield us neither profit nor credit, but only when we conquer and subdue them. If therefore we have any ambition of being better than we are in any respect, either in this world or in the next, we must cultivate the mind, the only part of us capable of any improvement.

The excellency of a rational creature consists in knowlege and virtue, one the foundation of the other: these are the things we ought to labor after: but sensual lusts are great impediments to our improvement in either of these, and do therefore properly war against the soul.

As to knowlege, the best and most useful part of it is the knowlege of ourselves, and of the relation we stand in to God

and our fellow-creatures, and of the duties and obligations arising from these considerations. Now this knowlege is such an enemy to sensual lusts, that a sensual man will be very much indisposed to receive it. It is self-condemnation to him to admit the principles of this knowlege; and therefore his reason, as long as it continues in the service of his passion, will be employed to discredit such knowlege as this, and, if possible, to subvert and overthrow the principles on which it stands. Hence proceed the many prejudices to be met with in the world against the first principles of natural religion; the many labored arguments to destroy the very distinction of soul and body, and all hopes of a future existence: such hard masters are the lusts of the flesh! They compel the soul to deny itself, to resign all its pretensions to present or future happiness, in condescension to the passions and appetites of the body. Take out of the composition of a man the inclinations to sensual pleasures, and he must needs rejoice to hear of another life in which he may be for ever happy. If he sees not so much reason as to be sure of living for ever, yet he will be willing to hope he may, and his mind will be always open to receive whatever may strengthen and support such hopes. But the sensual man sees nothing that such a future state can afford him but misery and destruction; therefore he shuts his eyes against the light, and places a guard over his mind, to secure it from such unwelcome thoughts. He hopes, he believes, at last he comes to demonstrate, that souls, and spirits, and future states, are mere idle dreams, the inventions either of fools or of politicians.

If the fear of God be in truth, as in truth it is, the beginning of wisdom, sensuality cuts us off from all hopes of improvement, considered as rational beings, by choking the spring from whence all wisdom flows. It ties us down to the world, it materialises the soul, and makes it incapable of any noble thoughts or conceptions worthy itself. And thus men, by following the sensual enjoyments of the world, become carnal in their minds, as well as in their bodies; and instead of a reason qualifying them to be servants of God, the highest honor of which a rational being is capable, they get a low cunning to serve themselves and the worst of their own desires, which

differs but little from the strong instincts to be found in creatures of a lower order; but little, I mean, in point of excellency, though in another respect it differs much. The creatures answer the ends of their nature, and are guiltless in pursuing their several instincts: but the sensual man is useless to himself, injurious to the world, and, as far as in him lies, brings a reproach on the hand that made him. For,

Secondly, virtue and morality are the distinguishing characters of rational beings; but these will always be lost where the appetites have dominion.

In all cases where our thoughts are confined to ourselves, and we aim at no other end than our own interest or pleasure, we act on a principle destructive of morality. The ability we have of extending our views beyond ourselves, and considering what is fit and proper and reasonable with regard to others, is the foundation of morality. It is not perhaps a total want of reason that renders brutes incapable of morality; but whatever reason they have, it is confined to themselves, and exercised only with regard to their own wants and desires, and this renders them immoral agents. Now every degree of sensuality is an approach to this state: the sensual man labors in the gratification of his own passions, and has no other end than to serve himself, nay the worst part of himself, in all his actions. This makes him overlook what is due to others, and to cast behind him all regards to justice, equity, and compassion, in the eagerness of obtaining the object of his desires. Hence it is that the covetous man is apt to defraud all he deals with, to betray the trust committed to him, and to make a prey of the widow and the orphan unhappily placed under his protection. Hence it is that the ambitious man lays all waste about him, and fills the world with blood, violence, and rapine; sacrificing his country, friends, and relations, to his inordinate desire of power. Hence it is that the lustful man breaks the bonds of friendship and hospitality, and entails dishonor and reproach on the man who loves him best; hence it is that he lies in wait to betray unguarded innocence, and is content, for the sake of his passion, to bring shame, reproach, remorse of conscience, and all the evils of life, on a fellow-creature. It is the essence of morality to bound the desires within the limits of reason, justice,

and equity. It is not having or exercising great power that makes an ambitious man; a king may be as virtuous as any of his subjects; but it is getting and using it unjustly. It is not much wealth that denominates a man covetous, but it is the method of obtaining and dispensing riches that makes the difference. And for the other case mentioned, you shall have the resolution of it in the words of an Apostle: 'Marriage is honorable in all men, and the bed undefiled; but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.'

It is plain from these instances, that the virtue of a man consists in bounding his desires, and restraining them within the limits prescribed by reason and morality: these limits the lusts of the flesh are perpetually transgressing; every such transgression is a wound to the soul, which weakens its natural faculties, and renders it less able to discharge its proper office: for reason will not always strive with a man; but if often subdued by corrupt affections, it will at last give over the contest, and grow hard, stupid, and void of feeling.

And this suggests another consideration, to show how effectually sensual lusts do war against the soul, by extinguishing the force of natural conscience, and not leaving a man reason and religion enough to repent of his iniquities. The mind grows sensual by degrees, and loses all relish for serious thought and contemplation; it contracts a hardness by long acquaintance with sin, and is armed with a brutal courage which regards neither God nor man. Age and infirmities may free us from our sensual passions, the sinner may outlive his sins; but what is he the better, since his sins perhaps outlived his conscience, and left him without either will or power to turn to God? This is no uncommon case: and whenever it is the case, the circumstances which surround a man conspire to make it desperate. His mind, by being long immersed in sensuality, is unapt for serious reflexion, and indisposed to receive the truths which reason offers: and besides this, the little glimmering lights of religion, which shine but faintly in his mind, yield no comfort or consolation to him, and he dreads the breaking in of more light on him, lest, by knowing more, he should become more miserable: this makes him love the darkness in which he is, which helps to screen him from a sense of his own misery. And

thus the sensual man spends the poor remains of life with very little sense, and yet much fear of religion. And yet were this the worst, happy were this case, in comparison to what it really is: for sensual lusts war against the soul, against the very being itself, and will render it for ever unhappy and miserable.

The sensual man has but one hope with respect to futurity, and a sad one it is, that he may die like the beasts that perish: but nature, reason, religion, deny him even this comfort, and with one voice proclaim to us 'that God has appointed a day in which he will judge the world.' When that day comes, and he shall stand before the throne of God with all his sins about him, and every injured person ready to accuse and demand justice against him, it is much easier to imagine what his distress and misery will be, than for any words to describe it. Be the consequence of that day what it will, it must be fatal to sinners. Should the much talked-of, and the more wished-for annihilation be their doom, it is a sentence that destroys both body and soul; a sentence shocking to nature, and terrible to all our apprehensions; and to which nothing but a guilty conscience, and a fearful expectation of something worse, could possibly reconcile the sentiments of a man. But neither will this be the case: there is a fire that shall never go out prepared for the spirits of the wicked, a worm that never dies ready to torment them. It may be asked perhaps, do you mean a material fire, and a material worm? In good truth I am little concerned to answer this question; there is one who will answer it, even he who said it. There is nothing I think so weak as the disputes about future punishments. Do you imagine that God wants means of punishing sinners effectually? or do you think that, when he comes to punish sin, you shall have a saving bargain, and that your present enjoyments will be worth all you can suffer for them hereafter? If you imagine this, you must think God a very weak being: but if you think him a wise governor, rest satisfied that there is nothing to be got by offending him; and that it is a foolish encouragement you give yourself, in imagining that the pains of hell will be less tormenting than they are represented to be, when you may be sure, from the power and wisdom of God, that the pleasures of sin will be too dearly purchased at the price of them.

But to return to the argument before us: let us look back, and take a short view of the sensual man's condition. In this world his passions find so much employment for his reason, that he is excluded from the improvements peculiar to a rational being, and which might recommend him to the favor of his Maker: with respect to his fellow-creatures, he is void of morality; with respect to God, he is void of religion: he has a body worn out by sin, and a mind hardened by it: in his youth he strives to forget God, in his old age he cannot remember him: he dies fuller of sins than of years, and goes down with heaviness to the grave, and his iniquities follow him, and will rise with him again when God calls him to appear and answer for himself: then will his lusts and appetites, and all the sins which attended on them, rise up in judgment against him, and sink his soul into everlasting misery. The sum then of his account is this: the sensual man has his portion of enjoyment in this world with the brutes, and in the next his punishment with wicked spirits. This is the war which the lusts of the flesh wage against the soul; from such enemies a wise man ought to fly, for they have power not only to destroy the body, but 'to cast both body and soul into hell.'

SUMMARY OF DISCOURSE XXIV.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XXVII.—VERSE 38.

THE text shows what different effects the judgments of God have on the minds of men: this strongly exemplified in the end of the two malefactors: hence appears the adorable wisdom of God, who, by these examples of justice and mercy brought so near together, has taught us to fear without despair, and to hope without presumption. Who does not tremble for himself, when he sees the man perish by his Saviour's side, and wanting only faith to be saved? What would not the dying sinner give to have his Saviour thus near him? Yet the thief who had this advantage died in his sins, void of hope and comfort. Must the sinner then despair, and has God forgotten to be merciful? No; behold him who is on the other side of the cross! His state enlarged on: thus the case stands, with all the allowances made to it, which seem most to favor a death-bed repentance: and yet, as if Scripture had not noticed the wretch who died blaspheming Christ, nor given us cause to fear that a wicked life may end in a hardened death, the case of the penitent only is drawn into example, and such hopes built on it as are inconsistent with the laws of God, and the terms of salvation. The penitent, as soon as he knew Christ, repented of his sins: if the example pleases you, *go and do likewise;* if you act otherwise, you like nothing but the lateness of the repentance; and you would imitate the thief rather than the penitent Christian. If you fancy you can imitate and enjoy both these characters, you deceive yourself; his case cannot be *yours; his example* therefore cannot be your security: but

suppose it were parallel to that of the dying Christian, yet it affords no certain hope; since the proof is as strong from the impenitent thief, that you will die in your sins, as from the other case, that you will repent of them. Time does not allow us to consider this case in all its views; but only to point out the circumstances that distinguish it from that of the dying Christian; and then to show what little hope this example affords, allowing the case to be what it is generally supposed to be. First, in all this perhaps there may be nothing which resembles a death-bed repentance: malefactors often lie in prison long before their trial and execution; and if that be the present case, here is time for conversion; circumstances incline this way: these enlarged on; whence it is probable that he had learned the dignity and character of Christ elsewhere, and came persuaded of the truth of his mission: but how unlike to him are those who desire not to lie down Christians, though they would willingly die penitents. Secondly, no example can be drawn by Christian sinners from this great work, even if it was begun and finished on the cross; since the conversion of a Jew or a heathen is one thing, and the repentance of a Christian is another. God has promised, through Christ, that the sins of a repentant and converted unbeliever shall be forgiven: this the penitent's case: his pardon answers to baptismal regeneration, but has nothing to do with a death-bed repentance, and therefore affects not those who have fallen from grace once received. Thirdly, the crimes of this unconverted sinner were not so aggravated as the sins of Christians; he sinned against the light of nature, and the rules of reason and morality: this topic enlarged on; he therefore had a better plea for mercy than the Christian who sins in despite of knowlege and the Holy Spirit; for to sin in hopes of pardon and the prospect of a late repentance, aggravates the crime, and is an abuse of God's mercy. The guilt of the heathen and Christian sinner compared: for the former of these Nature herself pleads before her great

Creator. If the penitent first learned Christ on the cross, how much more had he to say for himself than the Christian, who comes to make his peace at the hour of death! Example given of this penitent's pleading before his Lord: 'Lord, I am one of those sinners, for whom thy Son now expires: I was conceived in sin: I have wandered in darkness, without the light of thy gospel and the help of thy Spirit: accept the poor remains of life, since it is all I have had to offer: receive my latest breath, which confesses my own guilt, and declares my Saviour's innocence: join me to him, as in death, so in life everlasting.' But can the dying Christian plead these things, after a hardened life of sin and impenitence, against the light of the gospel, and the proffered assistance of God's Spirit? This matter more fully treated of. May not the Lord then say to such a one calling for mercy at his last moments, 'How long have I waited in vain for these prayers? how have you despised all my calls? But though you could fly from the mercy of God, his justice will overtake you.' Hence the wicked Christian's case is worse than that of the penitent on the cross; which therefore is no example whereby he may expect mercy. Other circumstances fit to be observed, which render a death-bed repentance insecure. First, he that sins in hope of repenting at last, may sin so far as to become hardened and incapable of repentance: this reflexion grounded on the case of the impenitent thief; who, though he had all the advantages which the other had, died reproaching Christ, and joined in that bitter jeer, *if thou be the Christ, come down from the cross.* This example might be backed by many more in our own time: the cause of this is, that the Holy Spirit will not always strive with sinners, but leaves them to perish in the hardness of their own hearts; for an habitual enjoyment of the pleasures of sin, in the hope of repenting, renders a man at last incapable of it; he learns *to make a mock of sin*, till his hardened conscience is unable to feel the languishing remains of

grace: hence the incapability of sinners to ask pardon on a sick-bed. Neither can a man resolve how far he will sin, any more than how tall or short he will be: daily experience proves this; and happy are they who want this fatal experience! The moment a man gives himself up to sin, he gives himself out of his own power; sets the passions free; and drowns the voice of conscience: and when reason and conscience are destroyed, religion must soon follow after them: in this general rout, how can one poor resolution, that of repentance, escape? This point enlarged on. Let those therefore who have it still in their power, consider their danger, and reason with their own hearts, even for a few moments, on which all eternity depends. Secondly, if you could preserve your resolutions of repentance, it is not in your own power to secure an opportunity of executing them. The thief on the cross died a violent death, happy in this at least, that he had no pretence to defer his repentance, in prospect of a farther opportunity; nor was his heart to be allured by the pleasures of life, when life itself was so near expiring. From this death may we all be defended: yet without it which of us can hope for such favorable circumstances for repentance? Whenever the sinner thinks of repentance, he finds it a work of such trouble that he is unwilling to set about it: no man is so old, but he thinks he may live one year more: hence the procrastination of his repentance, till sickness and infirmities render it impossible. This elicited the moving petition of the Psalmist: *so teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.* The way that men generally number their days causes only folly and wickedness; and the years to come, which they rejoice in, render them careless of the great concerns of immortality; hence their delusion. But suppose yourself in the thief's case, and a day fixed, on which you are to die; could you then delay your repentance? could you then say, to-morrow will be time enough? and if you would not do it then, why will you

do it now? only because you think you will have time enough for this work hereafter; in this expectation death or its previous sickness arrives; and thus very few think of repentance till they are confined to a sick-bed: so that the unfortunate death of the converted penitent on the cross was an advantage which few Christians will give to themselves. Thirdly, the death-bed repentance of a Christian will want another advantage peculiar to that of the thief on the cross; a sound body and mind, capable of performing such acts of faith and devotion as are necessary to repentance and conversion: the different case of a sick, feeble, languid sinner compared with this: whence it comes that repentance is often impracticable to a sinner: but if he possess his sense and reason, yet the general result of his repentance is horror and despair: the fearful consequences of this state enlarged on; so that even supposing all circumstances most favorable, you give him no security; if he is not sensible of his sins and impenitence, he will die like the wicked thief on the cross; and if he becomes sensible of them, how shall he be preserved from such despair as will render him neither fit to live nor fit to die? Nothing but an extraordinary degree of grace can preserve this man in a temper fit for repentance, neither too presumptuous, nor too slavish: but who can tell whether God will grant this at the last, to such as have rejected his constant calls? It cannot be supposed that God intends to save Christians thus, which would be to make void all the rules and duties of the gospel. This matter more fully explained: if you do your best to obtain the promises of the gospel, happy are you; but if you seek new ways to salvation, joining the pleasures of sin to the hopes of the gospel, you deceive yourselves; for *God is not mocked.* Conclusion; exhorting all who love their own souls, to work for their salvation while they have the light, *for the night cometh, when no man can work.*

DISCOURSE XXIV.

MATTHEW, CHAP. XXVII.—VERSE 38.

Then were there two thieves crucified with him; one on the right hand, and another on the left.

WHAT different effects the judgments of God have on the minds of men, may be learned from these examples now before us. Here are two thieves crucified with our blessed Saviour; two, who were probably guilty of the same crimes, and now under the same condemnation; both brought by the providence of God to suffer in the company of his own Son, whose blood was shed for the sins of the whole world. But mark the end of these men: one died reproaching and blaspheming Christ, and breathed out his soul in the agonies of guilt and despair; the other saw, acknowleged, and openly confessed his Redeemer, and expired with the sound of those blessed words in his ears, 'To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise.'

How adorable is the wisdom of God, who has thus instructed us; and by setting the examples of his justice and mercy so near together, has taught us to fear without despair, and to hope without presumption! Who would not tremble for himself, when he sees the man perish in his sins who died by his Saviour's side; within reach of that blood which was poured out for his redemption, but wanting faith to stretch out his hand and be saved?

What would the dying sinner give to have his Saviour so near him in his last moments, that he might pour out his soul before him, and seize by violence the hand which alone is able

to save? Yet he who had all these advantages enjoyed none of them; but died in his sins, void of hope and of comfort.

Must the sinner then despair, and has God forgot to be merciful? No: cast your eyes on the other side of the cross, and there you may see the mercy of God displayed in the brightest colors. There hangs the penitent, surrounded with all the terrors of approaching death; yet in the midst of all calm and serene, confessing his sins, glorifying the justice of God in his own punishment, rebuking the blasphemy of his companion, justifying the innocence of his Saviour, and adoring him even in the lowest state of misery; and at last receiving the certain promise of a blessed immortality.

Thus the case stands with all the allowances made to it which seem most to favor a death-bed repentance; and yet, as if the Scripture had said nothing of the wretch who died blaspheming and reproaching Christ, nor given us any cause to fear that a wicked life may end in a hardened and obdurate death; the case of the penitent only is drawn into example, and such hopes are built on it as are neither consistent with the laws of God, nor the terms of man's salvation; for even of this example the most preposterous and absurd use is made. This penitent, as soon as he came to the knowlege of Christ, repented of his sins: if you are fond of the example, 'Go and do likewise:' if you delay, and pursue the pleasures of sin, on the encouragement which this instance affords you, it is plain that you like nothing in the repentance, but only the lateness of it; and that your inclinations are to imitate the thief rather than the penitent Christian. Once he lived by violence, in defiance of the laws of God and man: when he was penitent, he abhorred and detested his iniquities. Which part would you imitate? If both, if like him you propose to enjoy the pleasures of sin, and like him to repent and enjoy the pleasures of heaven, you mightily impose on yourself; his case can never be yours, and therefore his example cannot be your security. Besides, were the case indeed parallel to that of the dying Christian, yet still it can afford no certain hope; since the proof is as strong from the case of the impenitent thief, that you shall die in your sins; as it can be from the other case, that you shall repent of them.

It would take up too much of your time to consider this case distinctly in all its views: I shall therefore only briefly hint to you the circumstances which distinguish it from that of the dying Christian; and then proceed to show what little hope this example affords, allowing the case to be what it is generally supposed to be.

First, then, in all this perhaps there may be nothing resembling a death-bed repentance. It is no uncommon thing for malefactors to lie in prison a long time, before they are brought to trial and execution; and if that is the present case, there is room enough for the conversion of this criminal before he came to suffer. The circumstances incline this way. How came he to be so well acquainted with the innocence of Christ, if he never heard of him till he met him on the cross? How came it into his head to address to him in the manner he does, 'Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom?' What were the marks of royalty that were to be discovered on the cross? what the signs of dignity and power? What could lead him to think that his fellow-sufferer had a title to any kingdom? what to imagine that he was Lord of the world that is to come? These circumstances make it probable that he had elsewhere learned the character and dignity of Christ, and came persuaded of the truth of his mission: and what is this to them, who have no desire to lie down Christians on their death-bed, though they would willingly go off penitents?

Secondly, suppose this great work were begun and finished on the cross; yet it cannot be drawn into example by Christian sinners: because the conversion of a Jew or a Heathen is one thing, and the repentance of a Christian is another. The promises of God, through Christ, are so far certain, that whenever an unbeliever repents and is converted, his sins shall be forgiven. This was the penitent's case; and therefore the pardon granted to him answers directly to baptismal regeneration; and has nothing to do with a death-bed repentance; nor can at all affect them who have fallen from grace once received. For,

Thirdly, the profligate life of this unconverted sinner was not attended with such aggravating circumstances as the sins of Christians are. He sinned against the light of nature, and the

common rules of reason and morality: but it might at least be said for him, that he was the unhappy son of an unhappy father, conceived in the degenerate and corrupted state of nature; that he wanted both the sense and knowlege, the hopes and fears, and the helps and assistances which the gospel affords for destroying the power and dominion of sin: and the greater his weakness was, the fitter object of mercy was he; and because he had not been freed by grace from the power of sin, he had the better plea to be freed by mercy from punishment. But are there the same excuses, or the same hopes of pardon for Christians, who sin against knowlege, against the powerful motives of hope and fear, and in despite of the Holy Spirit with which they were sealed? To sin in hopes of pardon, and on the prospect of future repentance, is itself a great aggravation of sin, and a sad abuse of the mercy of God.

If the Heathen sins, he sins under those infirmities of nature for which Christ died; but the Christian sins under the use of all the remedies which the gospel has provided, and which were purchased for him by his dying Saviour. The condition of mankind after the fall afforded, without doubt, many arguments of pity and compassion; and such arguments as moved the Son of God to undertake their redemption. The ignorant, the unenlightened sinner has a right to plead all these arguments in his own behalf: his is the common cause of mankind; and nature, with unutterable groans, cries for him and all her children before her great Creator.

If the penitent received the first knowlege of Christ on the cross; yet how much more had he to say for himself than the Christian, who comes to make his peace at the hour of death? he might thus plead his unhappy cause: 'Lord, I am one of those sinners for whom thy Son now expires on the cross; I was conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity; I have wandered in ignorance and darkness, without the light of thy gospel to direct me, without the help of thy spirit to protect me: why was all my life so dark, and these few last minutes only blessed with the knowlege of thy Son? Lord, accept the poor remains of life, since it is all I have left to offer: my latest breath shall confess my own guilt and my Saviour's innocence:

and since thy wisdom has united me to him in this cross, let me never more part from him; but as I am joined with him in his death, so let me be likewise in his life for evermore.' But what shall the dying Christian say, after a hardened life of sin and impenitence? What words shall we put in his mouth to appease the anger of his injured Redeemer? You may spend your time in lamenting your past folly; but with what language will you approach to God? You have neither ignorance nor weakness to plead; you were enlightened with his word; and his Holy Spirit was ever ready to assist you, had you been ready to endeavor after holiness. What will you then say, when frightened and amazed you call for mercy at your last moments? May not the Lord then say, 'How long have I waited in vain for these prayers and these sighs? how have I spoken to you by your conscience within, and by the ministry of my word from without; and how have my calls been despised? The gates of mercy were always open to you, but you shut them against yourself: but though you could fly from the mercy of God, yet his justice will overtake you.' Consider but this calmly with yourselves, and you will find that the wicked Christian's case is so much worse than the penitent's on the cross, that there can be no reason for you to encourage yourselves on this example; or to hope for the same mercy, when your case will be greatly different. These are such circumstances as enter into the nature of the case, and will make it always unfit, and oftentimes impossible, to be imitated by a Christian. But there are other circumstances fit to be observed, which render a death-bed repentance very insecure and dangerous, though we should allow it all the hopes which have been raised from the case before us.

As, first, he that sins in hopes of repenting at last, may sin so far as to grow hardened and obdurate, and incapable of repentance when the time comes. This reflection is grounded on the case of the impenitent thief; who was crucified with our Saviour; who, though he had certainly all the outward advantages which the penitent had, yet he made no step towards repentance, but died reproaching Christ, and joining with those who crucified him, in that bitter jeer, 'If thou be the Christ, come

down from the cross.' Or if you want more evidence, this example may be backed by many more in our own time; it being no uncommon thing to see malefactors die stupid and senseless, and go out of the world as wickedly as they have lived in it: and what can this be attributed to, but to the desertion of God's Holy Spirit, which will not always strive with sinners, but sometimes leaves them to perish in the hardness of their hearts? So that the man who sins in hopes of repenting, can never be sure of this last retreat; because, by pursuing the first part of his design, that is, to enjoy the pleasure of sin, he may soon grow incapable of the last, which is repenting. I question not but that those who reserve themselves to these last hopes of repenting, mean sincerely to do it when the time comes; for hardly can I think that any man means to suffer for his sins: but then those who enter on sin with these tender regards to their own souls, soon grow above such mean thoughts, and would scorn to own themselves in the number of those who are candidates for repentance: they contract a familiarity with sin, and with Solomon's fools, learn to 'make a mock of it,' till by degrees their consciences are hardened, and not to be touched by those soft impressions which at the first setting out they felt from the languishing remains of grace. And from hence it comes to pass, that when these sinners lie down on a sick-bed, they often want both the will and the power to ask forgiveness; and by an habitual neglect of all parts of religion, become unable to perform any, even that in which all their poor hopes are concluded, to repent of and ask pardon for their sins. Nor is it in your own power to sin to what degree you please, or to preserve a sense of religion amidst the pleasures of iniquity: if it were, possibly the danger in this respect might be less: but habits grow insensibly; there is a kind of mechanism in it, as in the growth of the body; and he that gives himself up to sin can no more resolve how great a sinner he will be, than he that is born a man can resolve how tall or how short of stature he will be. To the truth of this, experience daily witnesses: happy are those who want this fatal experience! With how much pain and uneasiness do men bring themselves to do the things which in a little time they glory and take pride in, or at least grow easy and contented under?

And thus the man, who with great tremblings of heart and misgivings of mind, brings himself to taste the pleasures of sin, with resolutions of an after repentance, comes at last to be so well reconciled to his sins as not to think repentance necessary for them. The moment you give yourself up to sin you give yourself out of your own power; you lay the chains on the neck of reason and set the passions free: conscience, which used to be your advance-guard, and give you early notice of every approaching evil, falls into the power of lust and affection: and when reason and conscience are destroyed, the triple cord is broken, and religion must soon follow after; and how, in this general rout, one poor resolution, to repent of all this iniquity, should escape, is more than can be easily conceived: and yet when you lose that, you lose yourself; it is your last, your only hope. On the whole, there is much more reason to fear that sin, if once you indulge it, should get the better of and destroy your resolution of repentance, than that your resolution to repent should ever conquer and destroy the confirmed powers and habits of sin. And I wish those who have not yet put it out of their own power to reason calmly on these things, would enter into this debate with their own hearts, and consider what danger they are in: a few moments cannot be too much to spend in so weighty an affair: and whenever you retire to these cool thoughts, may the Father of mercies influence those moments of your life on which all eternity depends!

But, secondly, could you preserve your resolutions of repentance, yet still it is not in your own power to secure an opportunity to execute them. The thief on the cross died a violent death by the hand of justice; happy in this at least, that he knew how long he had to live; and had no ground to flatter himself with the hopes of many years to come. He had no pretence to defer his repentance in prospect of a further opportunity; nor was his heart to be allured by the soft and entertaining pleasures of life, when life itself was so near expiring. From the like death God defend us all! and yet without it which of us can hope for such favorable circumstances for repentance? Whenever the sinner thinks of repentance, he will find that he has a work of great sorrow and trouble on his

hands; and this will make him unwilling to set about it. No man is so old but that he thinks he may last out one year more: and then, why will not to-morrow serve for repentance as well as to-day? And thus the great work is delayed, till sickness or natural infirmities render him incapable of it. It was the sight of this strange delusion in which men live, still promising themselves longer life, and on those hopes deferring the necessary work of eternity, which made the holy Psalmist break forth into that moving petition: 'So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.' The way that men generally number their days can produce nothing but folly and wickedness: the many years to come which they rejoice in, serve only to make them careless and negligent, and thoughtless of the great concerns of immortality: and whether men are not deluded by these hopes let any one judge. Do but suppose that you were in the thief's case, and certainly to die on a fixed day: do you not think that you should have other thoughts, other concerns about you? Could you then delay your repentance, and say, to-morrow will be time enough? If you would not do it then, why will you do it now? Only for this reason, that you think you have time enough in reserve to do this work hereafter. And so you may continue to think with as much reason as you do now, till death, or the sickness which leads to it, surprises you. And hence it comes to pass that very few who sin with resolutions of repentance, ever think of it till they are confined to a sick-bed; because, as long as they are in health, they have always this answer ready, it will be time enough hereafter. So that the unfortunate end to which justice brought this penitent on the cross, was, with respect to his conversion, an advantage that few Christians will give themselves: the certainty of his death made his repentance certain, permitted him no delays, no vain excuses, no flattering hopes of better opportunities hereafter.

Thirdly, considering that Christians, who propose to themselves this example of the thief on the cross, seldom repent till they are warned by sickness to prepare for death: they will evidently want another advantage which this penitent had. His death not being the effect of any bodily pain or distemper, but of the judge's sentence, he brought with him to the cross,

which, if you please, you may call his death-bed, a sound body and mind. He had his senses perfect, his reason fresh and undisturbed; and was capable of performing such acts of faith and devotion, as were necessary to his repentance and conversion. But how different often is the case of the sick and languishing sinner! Perhaps he labors under such acute pains as will give him no respite for thought or reflection; or perhaps he dozes and lies stupid, without knowing his friends and relations, or even himself; or perhaps the distemper seizes his head, and he raves and is distracted, loses his sense and reason, and every thing of the man, but the outward shape, before his death. And are not these hopeful circumstances for repentance? Is a man likely to know and find out his Saviour, when he knows not even his own brother who stands by his bed-side? These are very common circumstances, and such as render repentance impracticable. But should the sinner escape all these accidents, and go off gently without being forsaken by his sense or reason; yet still it may happen, and often it does, that his promised repentance produces nothing but horror and despair. In his lifetime he flattered himself with unreasonable hopes of mercy, and now he begins to see how unreasonable they were: now he can think of nothing but that he is going to appear before his Judge, to receive the just rewards of wickedness: he sees him already clothed with wrath and majesty; and forms within his own tormented breast the whole process of the last day. If he sleeps, he dreams of judgment and misery; and when he wakes, believes his dreams forebode his fate. Thus restless and uneasy, thus void of comfort and hope, without confidence to ask pardon, without faith to receive it, does the wretched sinner expire, and has the misfortune to see his hopes die before him. In a word then, put all the favorable circumstances together that you can imagine; bring the sinner by the gentlest decays of nature to his latter end; give him the fairest and the longest warning; yet still you give him no security: if he is not sensible of his sin and impenitence, he will die, like the wicked thief on the cross, reproaching Christ, hardened and obdurate against the thoughts of judgment: or if he comes to a sense, and sees his own unworthiness, how shall he be preserved from despair, and such a dread of his righteous Judge, as will make

him neither fit to live nor fit to die? Nothing but an extraordinary degree of grace can preserve him in a temper fit for repentance, free on one side from confidence and presumption, on the other from slavish fear which casts out love, which may produce sorrow, but not repentance. And whether those who have lived under the continual calls of grace to virtue and holiness, who have rejected the counsel of God whilst they had health and strength to serve, shall be thought worthy of such extraordinary mercy at last, let any reasonable man judge. It cannot be supposed that God intends to save Christians in this way; which would be at once to evacuate all the rules and duties of the gospel. Christ came to destroy sin and the works of the devil; but were men promised forgiveness on the account of a few sighs and tears at last, this would effectually establish and confirm the kingdom of Satan. Though God has promised pardon to penitent sinners, yet his promise must be expounded so as to be consistent with his design in sending Christ into the world; and then it can never be extended to those who use the gospel as a protection to wickedness, and sin because God has promised to be merciful. In a word, you have the promises of the gospel set before you, you have the mercies of God in Christ offered to you; if you will accept them and do your part, happy are you: but if you are for finding out new ways to salvation, if you seek to reconcile the pleasures and profits of sin with the hopes of the gospel, you do but deceive yourselves: for 'God is not mocked,' nor will he regard those who make such perverse use of his mercy.

What then remains, but that all who love their own souls seek the Lord whilst happily he may be found; and work for their salvation whilst they have the light; 'for the night cometh, when no man can work.' The night cometh on apace, and brings with it a change which every mortal must undergo. Then shall we be forsaken of all our pleasures and enjoyments, and deserted by those gay thoughts which now support our foolish hearts against the fears of religion. The time cometh, and who, O Lord, may abide its coming! when we must stand before the judgment-seat of Christ; when the highest and the lowest shall be placed on the same level, expecting a new distribution of honors and rewards. In that day the stoutest heart

will tremble, and the countenance of the proudest man will fall in the presence of his injured Lord. I speak not to you the suggestion of superstition or fear, but the words of soberness and of truth. May they sink into your hearts, and yield you the fruits of spiritual joy and comfort here, and of glory and immortality hereafter!

END OF VOL. I.

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